

HOKUSAI

ARTWORK LABELS

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Hokusai

Katsushika Hokusai is regarded as one of the most influential and creative minds in the history of Japanese art. His unique social observations, innovative approach to design and mastery of the brush made him famous in Edo-period Japan and globally recognised within a decade of his death.

The self-described 'Old man mad about drawing' was known by at least thirty names during his lifetime and was renowned for his unconventional behaviour. Despite his fame, Hokusai never attained financial success and his years of greatest artistic production were spent in poverty. He travelled and moved his resting place and studio regularly, finding inspiration for his unique style through his close observation of nature and interactions with ordinary people.

Hokusai features 176 works from the Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto, and the NGV Collection that encompass the artist's remarkable seventy-year career. For the first time in Australia, seven of Hokusai's major series, including *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*, 1830–34, will be on display; a selection of rare prints and paintings which show the stylistic and thematic changes of Hokusai's formative years; and three sets of illustrated books, including the *Hokusai Manga*, that highlight the artist's masterful and compositionally innovative book illustrations.

Early to mature works

During Hokusai's long career he constantly experimented with styles, explored new subjects and created new genres. In 1779, at the age of nineteen, he entered the prestigious Katsukawa School studio and for the next fourteen years, using the name Shunrō, produced illustrations for novels; European perspective-style prints; poetry album prints; and single-sheet kabuki portraits in the Katsukawa studio's style.

After leaving the Katsukawa School in 1793 Hokusai worked as an independent artist under the names Sori and Kakō. His prints from this time capture intimate and poignant interactions between people set in the natural environment. In many of these works we see the emergence of Mt Fuji as an ever-present backdrop, marking the beginning of Hokusai's personal obsession with the sacred mountain.

During the early nineteenth century Hokusai's fascination with European imagery led him to produce woodblock prints that imitated European aesthetics and a wide variety of works depicting human relationships, social situations and popular stories. Throughout this long period of artistic development, Hokusai refined an ability to instill his human figures, animals and landscapes with a realism and personality that brought them to life and set him on a trajectory to produce his groundbreaking series of the 1830s.

Mystic lion dogs

Shishi zu

c. 1820

ink and pigments on silk

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Shishi (lion dogs) are believed to be talismanic and auspicious creatures that bring good health and bountiful harvests. For these reasons, Hokusai became obsessed with drawing and painting *shishi*, and at one stage is noted to have made a small sketch of a *shishi* every day, as a talismanic offering, in the hope that they would bring good health and assist him in his quest to reach the age of 100. The superb gestural brushwork, and the variation of thick and thin, crooked and curling lines, display Hokusai's mastery of the brush and gives these *shishi* a great feeling of animation. When their eyes are dotted with ink, the animals seem to come alive.

Agemaki no Sukeroku (Ichikawa Danjirō V)

1782

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

As a young artist apprenticed to the Katsukawa School, Hokusai worked in the conventions of its master, Shunshō, who gave him the name Shunrō. Many of Hokusai's best works of this time are of famous kabuki actors that were celebrities of the day. Agemaki no Sukeroku is the lead role in the popular kabuki play *Sukeroku*. The lead character is clearly recognisable as the samurai *Sukeroku* by his headband, bullseye-patterned umbrella and distinctive face make-up. With umbrella held aloft, he stands in front of a *tensuioke* (water barrel for extinguishing fires), striking his most dramatic *mie* (powerful stage pose).

Sakata Hangorō III as a travelling priest, actually Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo

Sakata Hangorō sandaime ryosō jitsuwa Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo

1791

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This is one of Hokusai's most accomplished kabuki prints. Originally the right sheet of a diptych, the work depicts a scene from the play *The Golden Hilt Ornament and the Square Swordguard of the Minamoto Family* (1791). In it we see the actor Sakata Hangorō III, known for his powerful stage presence in the roles of villains and heroes, in a graveyard scene casting off the disguise of a travelling priest to reveal his identity as Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo, a surviving samurai of the Minamoto clan. While holding the skull of his fallen lord, Chinzei Hachirō Tametomo strikes a fierce and determined *mie* (powerful stage pose).

The actor Sawamura Sōjūrō in seven roles

Sawamura Sōjūrō Shichihenge

from the *Toy Prints, Seven Pictures, Three Rows of Models* (*Shinpan nanahengesankai date no sugatami*) series

c. 1792

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Hokusai produced several *asobi-e* (toy prints), known as *kise kae ningyō* (change of clothes doll) prints. *The actor Sawamura Sōjūrō in seven roles* was one of several prints of this type produced for kabuki fans. It was designed so that six alternative costumes and wigs could be cut out and placed on the small portrait of the actor Sawamura Sōjūrō, in imitation of the swift costume and scene changes in kabuki theatre. These prints were usually cut up and played with, consequently very few examples survive today.

Enjoying a cool evening and fireworks at Sumida River *Sumida gawa nō ryō*

1780s

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

In this scene a group enjoy summer fireworks over Sumida River in Edo. While two babies point at the spectacle in surprise, two girls use *uchiwa* fans to cool themselves. The unmarried status of the girl on the left is indicated by her colourfully patterned *furisode* (kimono with long sleeves). In contrast, the group of three women all wear darker kimonos with short sleeves – a sign that they are older and married. To create an elegant and relaxed mood, the composition is mostly empty space apart from the soft silhouettes that indicate the far river bank, drifting pleasure boats and the whimsical red trail of fireworks.

Scene of the night attack in the play *The forty-seven rōnin* *Uki-e Chūshingura youchi no zu*

from the *Perspective Pictures (Uki-e)* series

1780s

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This depiction of the dramatic *Scene of the night attack in the play The forty-seven rōnin* uses a centralised composition with diminishing perspective to successfully create depth. The scene, however, is overly symmetrical, which results in a stilted image. In this climactic scene of one of the Edo period's most popular stories based on real events, Hokusai's characteristic humour is evident in the contrast between the frantic battle scene, with acts of bravery displayed in every corner of the large mansion, and one startled observer – perhaps the cowardly official Kira Yoshinaka – clinging to the rafters as he looks down from above.

Enjoying the evening cool, viewing fireworks at Ryōgoku Bridge

Ryōgoku-bashi yūsuzumi hanabi kenbutsu no zu

from the *Newly published Perspective Pictures (Shinpan uki-e)* series

1780s

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

As a junior artist, Hokusai produced several *uki-e* (pictures with diminishing perspective) informed by books and engravings imported by Dutch traders, as well as prints produced by Utagawa Toyoharu. This new compositional approach was a break from the traditions of layered or flat perspective that had previously been used by *ukiyo-e* artists. Ryōgoku Bridge was the main crossing over Sumida River, and the place of Edo's most famous *natsu matsuri* (summer festival) that featured music, dance, pleasure boating and fireworks. In this scene, crowds of people promenade among food, drink and entertainment stalls, and position themselves at vantage points on the bridge to view the fireworks.

The craftsman's workshop near Mt Fuji

Fujisan no sobani aru shokunin no shigotoba

from *The mist of Sandara (Sandara kasumi)* album

1798

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This sensitively composed print is one of Hokusai's finest from his Sori period. A travelling samurai passing Mt Fuji has stopped at an artisan's workshop. He gracefully leans over to light his *kiseru* (pipe) while a young maiden offers him tea. In the studio, an artisan is lathing ivory rings to make toggles known as *kagamibuta netsuke*. Produced for a poetry album, this print indicates the New Year season and the coming of spring. A folding screen features prints of the rising sun with pine trees, plum blossom, bamboo and chrysanthemums. The traveller has collected some real plum blossom and attached it to his baggage.

Peasant on horseback

Bajō nōfu zu

c. 1798

ink and pigments on paper

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

In this early painting signed 'Hokusai Sōri ga', the artist has used a diluted *sumi* (charcoal) ink to sketch the subject, then applied gestural brushstrokes with a more concentrated ink to articulate the rider and horse. In the hot twilight of a summer's day, a peasant languidly rides home after a hard day in the fields. He leans back on the saddle and has bunched up the hem and sleeves of his kimono in order to catch the cool breeze. His worn-out horse knows the way without guidance and has wandered into the stream to cool its hoofs.

The lovers Yosaku and Koman, twilight glow

Date no Yosaku Seki no Koman *Sekishō*

from the *Eight Views of Travelling Lovers from Joruri Plays*
(*Michiyuki hakkei*) series

c. 1800

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

During Hokusai's early and mid career, he produced numerous *bijin-e* (images of beautiful people). This series of ill-fated lovers is one of his finest and most emotionally charged. The print depicts a low-ranked samurai, Yosaku, who has run away from his family and master with a new lover, Koman. After accruing gambling debts, Yosaku persuades a boy, Sankichi, to steal for him. He is caught and sentenced to death. The couple, overcome with remorse, resign themselves to *shinju* (lovers' suicide). In this intimate scene outside a tea house near Mt Fuji, the lovers contemplate their fate and blissful times together in the next life.

The Dutch picture lens: Eight views of Edo

Oranda gakyō, Edo hakkei

c. 1802

Optical viewing device (cover)

Suruga-chō

Kannon Temple

Ryōgoku Bridge

Shinobaze-ike Pond

Sakai-chō

Takanawa

Yoshiwara

Nihonbashi Bridge

colour woodblocks

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This set of *koban* (small-sheet) prints, made using Japanese woodblock printing techniques, imitate European-style landscape engravings. Sets of perspective prints such as these were designed to be viewed with a device known as *nozoki karakura*, illustrated on the set's folio cover, that enhanced the illusion of perspective. Hokusai's application of European techniques can be seen in areas of solid black shadows; fine black lines; grey sky with horizontal white lines; formations of clouds; and printed borders imitating European frames. The print of *Suruga-chō* is a forerunner for the same view in the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* series produced thirty years later.

Mt Fuji and the old pine

Fuji komatsu zu

c. 1802

ink and pigments on silk

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

From around 1800 Mt Fuji started to appear in Hokusai's works, and this is one of his earliest paintings on the subject. A sense of depth has been created by the contrast between the close proximity of the gnarly tree trunk, and the smaller Mt Fuji in the distance. The calligraphy is by a member of Hokusai's literati circles, Bunraian Yukimitsu, and reads: 'Contemplating Mt Fuji in the distance / If you listen carefully to the sounds around you / The lessons you have rehearsed for a long time / Sound like a pleasant poem of wind through the pines'.

Nomura comic stage, the mirror polisher

Nomura Kyōgen, kagami togi

1800s

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Throughout his career Hokusai produced many *surimono* (privately commissioned prints). This humorous example, depicting a puppet play, was produced as a gift for patrons and sponsors of a *kyōgen* theatre group. Established by the Edo-period puppeteer Norimatsu Kanbei, this style of performance is known as *Norimakyōgen*. In the lower section of the print there is a patterned stage valence, behind which two young female puppeteers manipulate puppets in the roles of old men in comical situations. This style of comedy was known as *Ma-kyōgen* (slow-moving comical performance).

Gilding the statue of Buddha

Butsuzō token

1800s

colour woodblock and gold leaf

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This *surimono* (privately commissioned) print is signed 'Hokusai seki ga', which indicates that the artist was invited to attend an auspicious event in which gold leaf is applied to a statue of Buddha. The reclining Buddha's facial expression is one of patience, belied on closer inspection by his fingers tapping at his thigh – indicating that he is feeling quite bored but resigned to the long, gilding process ahead. Three skilled artisans are fussing comically about the reclining figure. One unties a new bundle of gold leafing, while the other two delicately hold the fragile leaf with chopstick-like tongs.

Famous places on the Tōkaidō at a glance

Tōkaidō Meisho Ichiran

1818

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

During the Edo period, the shogunate developed a system of roads to facilitate travel and communications between cities and towns. In this bird's-eye-view map, Hokusai has laid out the most frequented of these roads, the Tōkaidō (Eastern Sea Road), that connected the shogun's capital Edo, seen in the bottom right, with the old imperial capital Kyoto that appears in the upper right. Other sights – such as the fifty-three post stations along the Tōkaidō, temples, shrines and hundreds of regional villages and towns – are noted in tiny rectangular cartouches. Mt Fuji, with the sun rising behind it, is situated in the upper left.

Filial son at Yōrō Waterfall

Yōrō no kōshi zu

1804–05

ink and pigment on silk

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This scroll depicts a scene from the *The Enchanted Waterfall* – a folktale about a diligent woodcutter who collects kindling every day to buy sake for his blind father. One day, after falling asleep in the mountains, the woodcutter awoke to the unexpected aroma of sake. Discovering that a nearby waterfall had been transformed into a bubbling cascade of sake, he filled his travelling bottle and returned home to his father. Upon drinking the sake, his father's eyesight and good health were restored. When the story became known to the village folk, they rushed to experience the miracle, but were outraged to find that for them, the waterfall tasted only of water.

For kids

What makes you better when you are sick?

This woodcutter caring for his aging, sick and blind father found a waterfall which flowed with a special medicine. The dutiful son returns to his father with his bottle full of the elixir. When the father drinks it his sight and good health are returned.

Part of the story is written on the painting in Japanese by a man who loved art and wanted artists to work with poets. Can you find prints of other waterfalls in this exhibition?

Fisherman on the seashore rock (Self-portrait as a fisherman)

Ryōshi zu (jigasan)

1830s

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Hokusai is known to have produced only a small number of self-portraits; however, late in his career, he mastered the ability to incarnate his personality into the people, creatures and landscapes of his prints and paintings. *Fisherman on the seashore rock* was produced at the height of Hokusai's popularity, around the time of his *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* series, when he was in his early to mid seventies. It depicts an old fisherman sitting on a rock with rod and basket. His posture is relaxed and his facial expression full of contentment as he enjoys smoking his *kiseru* (pipe) while gazing into the distance.

Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji

Throughout Japanese history, Mt Fuji has inspired a sense of spiritual awe. The 3776-metre volcano rises from sea level in one monumental sweeping curve to the highest peak found in Japan. On a clear day, Mt Fuji was visible from vantage points in almost all neighbourhoods of the capital city of Edo, and its dramatic shape and changing seasonal beauty was foremost in the imagination of painters, poets and ordinary citizens throughout Japan.

It was this profound public sentiment, as well as the popularisation of domestic travel in nineteenth-century Japan, that informed publisher Nishimuraya Yohachi (Eijudō) and Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* series, 1830–34, which contains many of Hokusai's most famous and internationally recognised images. Completed in his early seventies, during the peak of his career, the series depicts Mt Fuji in different seasons and weather conditions from different viewpoints and distances. In these prints human activity in rural and city settings is juxtaposed with the dramatic and all-encompassing symbol of nature, Mt Fuji. More than simple pictorial views, the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* display Hokusai's genius at not only composing landscapes but also making acute social observations.

South wind, clear sky Red Fuji

Gaifū Kaisei

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Commonly known as *Aka Fuji* (Red Fuji), this print is masterful in its simplicity. Mt Fuji's elegant sweeping concave curve dramatically divides the composition, in contrast with the horizontal rows of clouds known as a mackerel sky because its appearance resembles that of a mackerel's patterning. A break in the clouds highlights the mountain's presence against the deep blue sky and emphasises the strength of the summit. We can recognise the season as late summer or early autumn, not only by the snow remaining in the mountain's shaded crags but also by a special autumnal phenomenon where early rays of sunlight illuminate the slopes of Mt Fuji in a deep red.

Thunderstorm beneath the summit

Sanka Haku-u

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Although *Thunderstorm beneath the summit* is similar in composition to *South wind, clear sky* its atmosphere is more dramatic. A crack of lightning flashes through dark clouds, evoking the sensation of rumbling thunder. Amid this powerful natural event, Mt Fuji majestically rises like a spiritual icon into a sky filled with rolling cumulus clouds. Hokusai enhances the sense of drama by showing Mt Fuji from the northern side, its rugged edge and dappled areas of brown and orange articulating the mountain's rocky volcanic slope. During summer months, lightning is known to strike from the side or below Mt Fuji while climbers approach its summit.

Seven-mile Beach in Sagami Province

Sōshū Shichiri-ga-hama

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The view of Mt Fuji from the ocean beaches of Shichirigahama (Seven-mile Beach) was favoured by artists throughout the Edo period. In the foreground we find pine shoots emerging from sand dunes, the pine tree symbolising resilience through long winter months. The beachside hamlet of Koshigoe and the island of Enoshima are also depicted. The works on this wall give a clear indication of the artist and publisher's original concept to exclusively use Prussian blue, printed with varying degrees of dilution, in the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* series. This initial approach was altered to include numerous other colours, after the release of five prints in the series.

Lake Suwa in Shinano Province

Shinshū Suwako

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Lake Suwa is located north-west of Mt Fuji and is surrounded by the mountains of Shinano Province (in present-day Nagano Prefecture). The lake supported numerous villages, the largest being Kami Suwa where Lord Suwa's Takashima Castle is located – visible in the distant left. Two figures row a boat across the lake towards a shrine on a promontory. The shrine and Mt Fuji are both places of Shinto nature worship and, interestingly, Hokusai has echoed the same shape in both. Additionally, he has depicted the monumental Mt Fuji as a tiny feature on the horizon, and the inconspicuous small shrine as a major subject in the foreground.

Umezawa hamlet fields in Sagami Province

Sōshū Umezawa-hidari

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Cranes are a symbol of longevity and when paired with Mt Fuji are auspicious symbols often related to New Year's celebrations. Hokusai had an interest in associating Mt Fuji with the sacred mountains of China, especially the mythical Mt Horai. Accounts of Horai describe its slopes as so steep that the hallowed summit could only be approached by immortals riding on the backs of flying cranes. This scene devoid of human habitation, combined with a tranquil setting and ethereal ambience, leads us to believe that Hokusai was depicting Mt Fuji as a mystical realm beyond our mortal reality.

Hongan-ji Temple at Asakusa in the eastern capital

Tōto Asakusa Honganji

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Asakusa was a bustling district of shops and restaurants that surrounded the enormous Asakusa Honganji Temple. Hokusai's aerial viewpoint features the temple's roof ends, with ornately carved wooden decoration and gigantic ornamental tiles known as *onigara* (ogre tiles). The scale of this decoration is emphasised by the five tiny figures carrying out maintenance at this precarious place. The kite in the centre indicates the occasion is New Year's Day, a popular time for flying kites and visiting temples. The curving string of the kite and the triangular shape of the temple's roof illustrate Hokusai's trademark style of repeating the shape of Mt Fuji in unlikely ways.

Ushibori in Hitachi Province

Jōshū Ushibori

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Ushibori was a town north-east of Edo, on Lake Kasumigaura. As in many of Hokusai's prints, here we share the daily existence of ordinary people and become immersed in the atmosphere of the moment. On a transport boat known as *takasebune*, two boatmen huddle in the entrance to the cabin, perhaps preparing a meal, while a third man leans over the gunwale to pour out the water used to rinse rice. As a silent observer at the side of the lake, we feel the serenity of the moment broken by the splash of water which sends two herons into flight.

Kajikazawa in Kai Province

Kōshū Kajikazawa

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This composition is considered to be one of the simplest and most evocative in the Mt Fuji series. Hokusai's ability to express movement and humanity's fragile coexistence with nature can be found in the humble fisherman perched precariously on a rock jutting over the surging river. Mt Fuji is elegantly depicted with minimal line work and a delicate gradation of blue in a misty sky. The form of the mountain has been ingeniously recreated by the shape of the rock leading to the bent posture of the fisherman, and the fishing lines sweeping back down to the bottom right of the frame.

Inume Pass in Kai Province

Kōshū Inume tōge

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This print shows the Kōshūkaidō Road west of Edo, on the way to the castle town of Kōfu. The scale of this mountainous landscape and arduous journey is emphasised by the tiny figures and laden horses, trudging their way up to Inume Pass. The lush gradation of green along the grassy ridge gives an impression of spring, validated by the gradual recession of the white cap on Mt Fuji that leaves dotted sections of snow on the mountain's middle slopes. As in many of Hokusai's Mt Fuji prints, a long, sweeping concave line, which defines the traveller's path, replicates the shape of Mt Fuji.

Surugadai in Edo

Tōto Sundai

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

During the Edo period the hills of Surugadai provided an excellent outlook over the city and views of Mt Fuji. Near the shogun's palace there were numerous samurai mansions, and at the bottom left of this print Hokusai has portrayed a samurai accompanied by three attendants. Beyond the roofs of Edo, Mt Fuji can be seen covered in snow, which indicates that the season is winter or early spring. Other figures include people carrying large boxes and bundles; farmers carrying baskets of produce; and a Buddhist monk with travelling hat and walking staff carrying a wooden box for prayer books on his back.

Cushion pine at Aoyama

Aoyama Enza-matsu

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The cushion pine located at Ryūgan-ji, a Zen temple in the village of Harajuku, was a famous site mentioned in Edo guidebooks. Taking its name from the distinctive shape of its branches, the cushion pine grew to more than thirteen metres wide. In the bottom right of this print we see a father and son climbing the hill together and a group of jovial picnickers drinking sake while taking in the view of the pine and Mt Fuji. On the left, the branches are supported by stilts, and Hokusai playfully includes a gardener cleaning up pine needles – indicated only by his rake and a bare leg blending in with the stilts.

Fujimigahara (Fuji-view Fields) in Owari Province

Bishū Fujimi-ga-hara

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This composition with Mt Fuji appearing as a tiny feature on the horizon is one of Hokusai's most unusual. A huge barrel is being constructed from wooden slats and bamboo rings by a cooper, who kneels among his tools. The natural triangular form of sacred Mt Fuji is framed within the man-made circle of the barrel, enshrining human toil and nature worship in one powerful and harmonious motif. Although Mt Fuji is some 240 kilometres from Owari Province and cannot be seen from this area, Hokusai and other *ukiyo-e* artists often created imagined scenes of places that did not exist.

Mishima Pass in Kai Province

Kōshū Mishima-goe

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

In a humorous play on scale, Hokusai shows Mt Fuji dwarfed by a huge *sugi* (Japanese cedar). Believed to be sacred, cedar forests grow on the lower slopes of Mt Fuji, and pairs of cedars are often found flanking the entrance to Shinto shrines and spiritual sites. In this image, the group of travellers who have stopped to rest are in awe of the tree's enormous scale and, in a playful form of nature worship, attempt to encircle its trunk by holding hands. The mystical appearance of Mt Fuji is enhanced by unusual cloud formations, in particular the *kasa-gumo* (travelling hat cloud) circling the summit.

Tama River in Musashi Province

Bushū Tama-gawa

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Those journeying from Edo to Mt Fuji would reach the Tama River on their first or second day of travelling, and while waiting to be ferried across it, weather permitting, could enjoy a magnificent view of the sacred mountain. In this composition Hokusai has divided the image diagonally to emphasise the river's width. Only a soft gradation of blue has been applied to the upper bank, leaving two thirds of it the colour of the paper. Printed lines highlighting flowing water fade as they reach the near side of the river and are printed without ink, embossed with a technique known as *karazuri* (empty printing).

Senju, Musashi Province

Bushū Senju

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Although Senju was considered the gateway to the north and a bustling centre for travellers, Hokusai has depicted a quiet scene, with Mt Fuji visible beyond rice fields and the Arakawa River. A man leading a weary horse takes a moment to raise the brim of his hat to enjoy a clear view. The horse is wearing straw sandals, and halfway along its reins is a small turtle – which perhaps is being taken home for dinner, or as a pet for his children. The efforts of people to harmonise and work with nature are symbolised by Hokusai's juxtaposition of Mt Fuji with four water gates.

Under Mannen Bridge at Fukugawa

Fukagawa Mannen-bashi-shita

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Mannen Bridge spanned Onagi River where it flows into Edo's major Sumida River and was situated in the area where Hokusai lived for the majority of his life. In an indication of its popularity as a vantage point to view Mt Fuji, more than thirty people are crossing or standing on the bridge to enjoy the view. Hokusai's inclusion of a man with an opened umbrella in the centre steals our attention away from Mt Fuji and hints at the artist's sense of humour. Two other figures by the man's side lean against the railing, looking directly back at the artist, Hokusai, and us, the viewer.

Ejiri in Suruga Province

Sunshū Ejiri

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

For this view, Hokusai has chosen to depict a desolate area of marshland through which the Tōkaidō Road passes, near the town of Ejiri. Hokusai was fascinated with natural elements and how to illustrate them. The comical figure studies of men and women struggling against the wind, first produced fifteen years earlier in Volume V of the *Hokusai Manga*, have here been placed in real-life situations. A stream of paper blows from a woman's kimono as her scarf impairs her vision; a man with two bundles tied to a pole loses his hat; and other travellers clutch at their belongings while leaning into the gale.

At sea off Kazusa

Kazusa no kairo

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kazusa was a province on the opposite side of Edo Bay from the city of Edo. During the Edo period, a considerable network of domestic trading ports extended the length of the country, connected by this style of large cargo ship known as *kitamaebune* (northern-bound ship). Hokusai has given close attention to recording the design and technical details of the vessel, and his understanding of geodetics (shape of the earth) is displayed by Mt Fuji gradually vanishing below the curve of the horizon. Through the small window on the side of the ship we can share the experience of some of the passengers.

In the Tōtōmi mountains

Tōtōmi Sanchū

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

In this image, one of Hokusai's most sophisticated, Mt Fuji is set within a triangular frame that supports a huge block of timber. The size of the timber powerfully divides the print diagonally from corner to corner. From positions both above and below the sacred mountain, men perform the job of sawing the entire length of timber with handsaws. A woman with a child talks to a third man sharpening a saw and a boy warms himself by a fire. The plume of smoke that crosses the diagonal of the large block counterbalances its strength and echoes the mysterious spiralling cloud circling Mt Fuji in the distance.

Tsukuda Island in Musashi Province

Buyō Tsukuda-jima

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Tsukuda was an island fishing village located at the point where the Sumida River flowed into Edo Bay, and marked the harbour's entrance to a complex system of canals that spread throughout the capital. Fishing boats, ferry boats and a variety of cargo boats are skilfully illustrated in foreshortened perspective. Behind the island we see the masts of larger vessels, and in the distance the masts of ships at the next village, possibly Kawasaki. The cargo boat with a triangular stack of goods, the island of Tsukuda and the group of boats in the distance lead our eye to Mt Fuji on the horizon.

The morning after a snowfall at Koishikawa

Koishikawa yuki-no ashita

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Koishikawa, a district north-west of Edo Castle, was known for its hills and superb views of Mt Fuji. As a result, it was a popular residential area for samurai and home to many temples, inns and teahouses. In this image of a clear morning after a heavy snowfall, a group staying in a *ryokan* (small inn) gather by the open window to enjoy the view. They are being served a meal on a red lacquer tray table while a man at the door on the far right welcomes another guest. The child with the group points towards the group of circling birds and Mt Fuji in the distance.

Lower Meguro

Shimo-meguro

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Meguro, now a commercial and suburban area of Tokyo, was once a farming area on the south-eastern outskirts of Edo. In this print Hokusai has placed Mt Fuji inconspicuously in a valley between hills with terraced fields. Stylised clouds along the bottom of the image give us the sensation of viewing the scene from an elevated position, which relates to the falconers standing below with their birds, asking a local farmer for directions. The rural setting includes several thatched farmhouses; a woman with boy and a baby strapped beneath her kimono; and a farmer climbing a path with a hoe over his shoulder, from which a packed lunch is suspended.

The great wave off Kanagawa

At the time of its creation, *The great wave off Kanagawa* (*The great wave*), 1830–34, was simply one of the compositions comprising Hokusai's Mt Fuji series. Within a short period of time, however, it became a favourite with Edo's print-loving public. Within four decades, the print was heralded by modern artists and thinkers in Europe, and during the twentieth century its status as, arguably, the single most famous image in all Asian art was established.

In addition to *The great wave's* sheer graphic beauty, there is a compelling compositional force in its contrast between wave and mountain. The horizon has been lowered to emphasise the height of the monstrous towering wave which stands in tense juxtaposition over the graceful lines of a diminutive Mt Fuji.

The dynamic composition creates a coexistence between human frailty and the power of nature. We see tiny fishermen huddled in their sleek crafts ride down one wave, dive straight into the next and endeavour to come out the other side. Every morning these boats, named *oshiokuribune*, transported fish to markets in Edo Bay from villages on the Bōsō Peninsula. The lifelike tentacles of the wave are captivating, and the undulating water allow us to share in the boatmen's perilous situation.

Two impressions

Although the exact number of prints produced in Japanese *ukiyo-e* editions is not known, it is speculated that approximately 2000 of each were produced in the first print run. Of these, the first 200 impressions are considered to display the printing block's sharpest impressions. Due to Japanese prints' ephemeral nature, there are only ten to twenty early impressions of *The great wave* believed extant.

The great wave prints of the NGV and Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto (JUM), can be identified as rare, early printings due to their sharp key-line block impressions. The sharper outlines of Mt Fuji and details in the boats in the NGV print suggest that it is slightly earlier. Because *ukiyo-e* prints were produced by hand, variations between the impressions can be found in the applications of pigment. For example, the grey overprinting of the sky in the JUM print is darker than that in the NGV print, making the splashes of water more prominent. The soft beige sky is more pronounced, and the gradation of grey on the horizon wider in the NGV impression.

The two works were produced at the same time, by the same publisher. The JUM print was purchased during the Edo period by the Sakai family, whose collection founded the JUM. The NGV print was purchased by the American collector John Stewart Happer during the late nineteenth century. Happer sold his famous collection in 1909, at which time *The great wave off Kanagawa* was purchased by the Felton Bequest for the NGV. This exhibition marks the first time these two prints have been reunited since their creation.

The great wave off Kanagawa

Kanagawa oki namiura

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1909

426-2

For kids

Jump in and join the fishermen on their journey to deliver fish to Edo (now named Tokyo)! Hokusai loved drawing pictures of Japan, especially of its tallest mountain, Mt Fuji. This is a very famous woodblock print showing a monstrous wave about to crash into three boats. The crest of the wave looks like long tentacles trying snatch back the fishermen's catch.

Imagine being in the boat at this moment. What do you see, hear and think?

The great wave off Kanagawa

Kanagawa oki namiura

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Noboto Bay

Noboto no ura

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The village of Noboto was located on the northern coast of Edo Bay. The main features of this print are two dynamically angled *torii* gates that indicate the presence of an unseen Shinto shrine to the right. Children are playing, village folk are chatting while collecting clams and two men return to shore holding their baskets high – all enjoying their day's work. Although the shrine is not visible, Hokusai has framed Mt Fuji, one of Shinto's most sacred places, and the activities of the villagers under the *torii* gates to allude to the Shinto ideal of humanity living in harmony with nature.

Yoshida on the Tōkaidō

Tōkaidō Yoshida

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Yoshida was a castle town several days' walk west of Mt Fuji. This teahouse scene depicts the people one would meet if travelling between Edo and Kyoto in the 1800s. Two women are sitting under a large sign which reads 'Fujimi Chaya' (Fuji View Teahouse). One is enjoying the clear view, and the other talks to the waitress who directs our attention to the snow-covered peak. On the left are two palanquin bearers, one wiping his head and the other repairing a straw sandal with a wooden mallet. On the right two exhausted male travellers sit with wrapped luggage, hats and a walking stick.

Sketch of the Mitsui shop at Surugacho in Edo

Edo Suruga-chō Mitsui-mise ryakuzu

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Views along the streets of Surugacho allowed a direct sightline to Mt Fuji and the grounds of Edo castle, whose moat wall and palace residences are in the distance. On the roof of the building three animated workmen are tossing tiles wrapped in straw for protection, and two flying kites indicate that it is the New Year period. Signboards note Ichigoya drapery store, established in 1673 and run by the Mitsui family, the forerunner to the present-day Mitsukoshi department store. The signage shows Mitsui's crest and advertises drapery and braids and threads.

Viewing the sunset over Ryōgoku Bridge from the Onmayagashi Embankment *Onmaya-gashi yori Ryōgoku-bashi sekiyō o miru*

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The magnificent arching curve of Ryōgoku Bridge, spanning Sumida River, was Edo's main river crossing and one of the city's busiest places. In this scene of the Onmaya ferry setting out with passengers and their possessions, the summer heat is implied by the man dragging his *tenugui* (handtowel) in the cool water. In the background we see the tranquil city at dusk and the silhouette of Mt Fuji on a pink-tinged horizon. The interiors of houses on the opposite bank are softly illuminated by oil lamps, and pleasure craft of various sizes are scattered across the river.

Nihonbashi Bridge in Edo

Edo Nihonbashi

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Nihonbashi Bridge was considered the arrival and departure point for all roadways to and from the capital Edo, and Nihonbashi River was the route traders would bring their merchandise into the bustling heart of the city. Although Hokusai gives only a hint of the bridge – showing the top of a pylon and the upper railing along the bottom edge of the composition – he has graphically illustrated the bustling mood of the district, with throngs of townsfolk carrying all types of goods back and forth. Along the riverside we can see cargo being unloaded into white-walled *kura* (fire-proof warehouses) and Edo Castle in the distance.

Waterwheel at Onden

Onden no suisha

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Hokusai was fascinated with depicting movement and human invention and believed the labours of workers within nature were spiritual activities. Here he has devoted almost half of the composition to the huge waterwheel of a mill. Four people, focused on their work, pay no attention to Mt Fuji. Two men carry unhusked rice to the mill and two women wash rice grains in the flowing water of the mill's flume. During the Edo period there were several large waterwheels in the rural area of Onden, located between Harajuku and Aoyama – now a region known for its nightclubs, fashion houses and expensive apartments.

Turban Shell Hall, Temple of Five Hundred Arhats

Gohyaku-rakan-ji Sazaidō

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Turban Shell Hall, a tower in Edo's district of Honjo, had a spiralling internal staircase which led to a viewing platform. In this print, two exhausted pilgrims sit with portable shrines by their side and other visitors lean casually against the railing to enjoy the cool air and view of Mt Fuji. The heat of the day is shown by a man wiping his brow; a woman holding a circular *uchiwa* (fan); and the gathered sleeves of many in the group. Two women wear *kanzashi* (hairpins) and *kasuri* (ikat) kimonos. Comically, the man with hands resting on the railing imitates the shape of Mt Fuji, seen directly above.

Reflection in Lake Misaka in Kai Province

Kōshū Misaka Suimen

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This view looks across Lake Kawaguchi towards Misaka Pass – a place renowned for its unimpeded views and mirror-like reflections of Mt Fuji. The print is famous for Hokusai's playful depiction of both summer and winter in the same scene. The mountain is depicted without snow, its rocky northern side, indicated with lines and a gradation of brown pigment. However, its reflection in the foreground shows a smooth snow-capped Mt Fuji with grey lower slopes. Hokusai has defied reality further by moving the mountain's reflection leftwards to create a more appealing, asymmetrical composition. A solitary boatman moves towards the reflected illusion of winter.

Enoshima in Sagami Province

Sōshū Enoshima

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Enoshima is a small island near the old capital Kamakura, approximately 40 kilometres south of Edo. Historically a religious sanctuary, during the Edo period Enoshima became a popular holiday and pilgrimage destination. The island's main attractions were places of worship dedicated to the female Buddhist deity Benzaiten; the Iwaya caves with their connections to Japanese folk traditions; and magnificent sea views of Mt Fuji. Groups of travellers cross a sandbar and climb up stairs to an avenue that runs between restaurants and local specialty shops to the main shrine of Benzaiten – a scene that remains relatively unchanged to this day.

Lake of Hakone in Sagami Province

Sōshū Hakone Kosui

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Lake Ashinoko is in the hilly area of Hakone south-east of Mt Fuji. A narrow pass on the Tōkaidō Road, it was a major checkpoint where travellers were processed before leaving or entering the capital city. To maintain strict control over the provinces, the family members of regional lords were required to reside in the capital to ensure loyalty to the shogun, and a network of checkpoints was developed to prevent their escape. This is one of the few prints in the Mt Fuji series that is devoid of people. The only signs of humanity are the roofs of Hakone Shrine on the banks of the lake.

Sekiya village on Sumida River

Sumida-gawa Sekiya-no sato

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Sekiya was on the banks of Sumida River just north of Edo. During the Edo period a communication system of foot runners and riders operated between major urban and administration centres. In this scene, Hokusai's great skill in depicting motion is demonstrated by the three riders galloping along a levy bank. In order to draw our attention from the riders to Mt Fuji, Hokusai has created a trail of red objects through the mostly green landscape. The eye follows the middle rider's red cape to the red horse, then on to the red pine tree and finally through the early morning mist to Mt Fuji, illuminated by the red sunrise.

Sketch of Tago near Ejiri on the Tōkaidō

Tōkaidō Ejiri Tago-no-ura ryakuzu

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Mt Fuji is seen from out at sea, looking back to the coast of Suruga Bay. In the foreground are two fishing boats, with figures on their bows casting nets and oarsmen straining against the choppy water. The elegant curves of the gunwales replicate the long sweeping line of Mt Fuji. One of the famous scenic sites on the Tōkaidō Road, the pine grove Miho no Matsubara, is depicted on the distant Tago beach (*Tago-no-ura*), which was renowned for its salt flats. Small salt burning kilns and workers' huts can be seen, as well as tiny figures scattered along the beach raking and carrying salt in baskets.

Hodogaya on the Tōkaidō

Tōkaidō Hodogaya

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This composition is known for its theatrical setting, in which travellers move like actors across a stage, and for the manner in which Mt Fuji is viewed between red pine trees. On the right we see a *komusō* (itinerant monk of the Fuke Zen sect), identified by his large basket-like hat and *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute). On the left a woman sits in a palanquin while her two palanquin bearers take a rest, one wiping his head and the other tying his sandal. In the centre, a horse and rider are being led by a man who draws our attention towards Mt Fuji with his stick.

Timberyards in Honjo

Honjo Tatekawa

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This scene displays a timberyard by the banks of Tate River in central Edo. Human activity and towering piles of wood take precedence over a diminutive Mt Fuji, almost hidden behind upright stacks of timber. The highlight of this scene is the strength and skill of a man at the bottom of a perfectly packed woodpile who tosses blocks to his fellow worker perched high on top of the wood. Within the composition, this herculean display exceeds the height of Mt Fuji and pays homage to the daily toils of humble workmen.

Fuji from Kanaya on the Tōkaidō

Tōkaidō Kanaya no Fuji

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The Oi River is located halfway between Edo and Kyoto, and was one of the widest waterways to cross on the Tōkaidō Road. Because there was no bridge, travellers had to be carried from one side to the other. In this scene Hokusai has depicted a treacherous spring torrent with surging water and foam. Individual travellers, with their heads lowered and feet raised, cling on tightly as they cross the river on the shoulders of porters. Travellers in palanquins, and bundles of cargo balanced on large trays with bamboo poles, are ferried across by teams of workers, cheered on by leaders standing aloft.

Fuji from the tea plantation of Katakura in Suruga Province

Sunshū Katakura chaen no Fuji

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Suruga, part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture, remains a major tea-growing region. Hokusai's depiction of Mt Fuji from the tea plantation in Katakura is one of the most detailed images in the Mt Fuji series and portrays the activities of a working tea plantation. Tea picking was the job of women, and we can see rows of women both seated and standing, wearing rounded hats or white headscarves, busily picking leaves. After the leaves have been loaded into large baskets, they were carried by men or by horses along a causeway to a hut in the foreground for sorting or steaming.

Nakahara in Sagami Province

Sōshū Nakahara

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This scene depicts the type of people one might meet while travelling the Tōkaidō Road. On the left, a man sieves water through a fishing basket; a woman with a baby carries a hoe, iron kettle and a wooden tub with lunchboxes; and a man with boxes of seed spins a rattle to frighten birds. In the foreground a Buddhist pilgrim with a portable shrine on his back returns from climbing Mt Ōyama, and a second pilgrim can be seen further along the path. On the right, a man carrying an umbrella and cloth-covered box displaying the publisher's mark, stops to admire Mt Fuji.

The new fields of Ōno in Suruga Province

Sunshū Ōno Shinden

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*
(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This quiet morning setting, with mist rising over paddy fields, herons flying into the distance and the glow of dawn to the east, is animated by the lumbering movement of oxen carrying reeds and languidly moving farmers. Ōno was on the Tōkaidō Road to the south-west of Mt Fuji, and the term *shinden* (new fields) described fields that were cultivated to support Japan's growing population. The idealistic scene of farmers returning home after a morning's labour, in the spiritual presence of Mt Fuji, embodies Hokusai's conception of human activity as an integral component of the natural world.

Dawn at Isawa in Kai Province

Kōshū Isawa no akatsuki

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This print depicts a dawn scene at the post station town of Isawa, on the Kōshukaidō Road, where the morning sunlight tinges the snow-covered peak of Mt Fuji orange. The craggier, north-facing side of the mountain is in dark shadow, and on the main street of the town – lined with thatched inns – travellers wearing rounded hats, accompanied by horses, palanquins and workers, are making preparations for departure. Where the road leaves town we see a large travelling trunk being carried at either end, and a man wrapped in a cape on horseback moving towards the long arching bridge that crosses the Fuefuki River.

Fuji from Gotenyama at Shinagawa on the Tōkaidō

Tōkaidō Shinagawa Gotenyama no Fuji

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Shinagawa was the first town on the Tōkaidō Road, located on the southern outskirts of Edo. In this print we see the traditional festive occasion of a *hanami* (cherry-blossom viewing party). The rooftops of Shinagawa appear in the bottom left, where parents with children riding on their backs are climbing up the hills of Gotenyama Park. In a celebration of spring, Mt Fuji rises into a blue sky and is surrounded by cherry blossoms in full bloom. Outside a teahouse, people dance with folding fans held high in merriment. On an adjoining mound another group of three men with picnic boxes sip sake while exchanging stories.

Fuji seen from the Senjū pleasure quarter

Senju kagai yori chōbō no Fuji

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

A feudal lord travelling with his procession of samurai retainers was a common sight along regional roadways. Senjū was the first post station on the road leading north-east from Edo and was known for its entertainment district, which is seen across the harvested fields. In the centre two farming women have stopped to rest beside a path and are entertained by a parade of samurai. On the right, a lord's palanquin is glimpsed as it moves out of frame followed by samurai carrying red cases containing firearms, and pike bearers yet to emerge from behind the thatched roof.

Fuji from the Minobu River

Minobugawa ura Fuji

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Minobu is a mountainous region located to the west of Mt Fuji, characterised by fast-flowing streams and forests. In this unusual view of Mt Fuji we only catch a glimpse of its summit between two rocky shaped outcrops, which gives the distinct feeling that if we travel further along the path the mountain will disappear from sight altogether. The atmosphere of clouds and the eccentrically shaped craggy mountains are reminiscent of those found in Chinese landscape paintings, and are influenced by techniques Hokusai would have gained through viewing the well-known *Mustard Seed Garden* (1679) manual of painting.

Groups of mountain climbers

Shojin tozan

from the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*

(*Fugaku-sanjū-rokkei*) series

1830–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This is considered to be the final print in the Mt Fuji series, and the only composition in which the mountain is not viewed from a distance. Hokusai depicts a procession of exhausted pilgrims approaching the mountain's final ascent. The soft orange and dark brown tinges of craggy air-pocked volcanic rock and mist-filled clefts are true to the real conditions of Mt Fuji's summit. The sky displays the orange hue of dawn, and in the upper corner a large group of climbers huddle together in a cave or a tiny man-made refuge for warmth while they await the sunrise.

A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces

This dynamic series contains some of Hokusai's most mesmerising design concepts. Encouraged by the groundbreaking results he achieved in works such as *The great wave off Kanagawa*, Hokusai took the theme of depicting moving water to a new and unprecedented level. *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces* was the first series on the theme of waterfalls published in Japan.

Hokusai selected eight waterfalls located between Nikkō Tōshōgu, approximately 100 kilometres north of Edo, and the mountains of Yoshino, near the ancient capital of Nara, approximately 500 kilometres west of Edo. To gain maximum effect and allow the waterfalls to fill the entire sheet, Hokusai executed the prints in vertical format.

The series extended his investigation into methods to compose a landscape print, and emphasised the importance of waterfalls in Japanese religious belief and practice. In Japan, waterfalls are not only scenic attractions but also, in most cases, locations closely related to Shinto nature worship and Buddhist ideology. Images of these natural phenomena were more than pictures of beautiful places; they were considered spiritual iconography. As the series title indicates, the collecting of such images could be seen as symbolising something akin to making a spiritual pilgrimage to the actual waterfalls.

Falling mist waterfall at Mt Kurokami in Shimotsuke Province

Shimotsuke Kurokamiyama Kirifuri no taki

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces* (*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kirifuri Waterfall was about seven days' walk north of Edo. It is located three kilometres along a valley north of the Nikkō Tōshōgū shrine, temple and mausoleum complex dedicated to the founder of the Edo period, Tokugawa Ieyasu. *Kirifuri* means falling mist, which describes the soft and cooling sensation of the waterfall's wide cascade and splashing water at its base. After enjoying the mesmerising motif of the falling water, the viewer discovers three pilgrims at the bottom of the waterfall, gazing up in wonderment, and two more intrepid travellers who have clambered halfway up the waterfall to gain a different perspective of the natural spectacle.

The Amida Falls in the far reaches of the Kisokaidō Road

Kisoji no oku Amida-ga-taki

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces* (*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The Amida Falls in the far reaches of the Kisokaidō Road is one of the most stylised and visually intriguing of all Hokusai's creations. The mountains and valleys of Kiso were considered difficult to access and were said to contain mythical scenery. This print's radical design includes an overhead view of flowing water in the circular hollow, and a frontal view of the torrent cascading in tiny streams. The waterfall derives its name from the popular Buddhist deity Amida Nyōrai, whose figure takes a similar shape to the cascading water and circular hollow at the top.

The Kannon of the Pure Waterfall at Sakanoshita on the Tōkaidō Road *Tōkaidō Sakanoshita Kiyotaki Kannon*

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Sakanoshita was situated on the Tōkaidō Road in a mountainous area between Nagoya and Kyoto. *Kiyotaki* means 'clear or clean waterfall', and *kiyo* often relates to the Bodhisattva Kannon who personifies compassion. This gently flowing waterfall divides into veins of water that flow through crevices and over a rocky cliff face. At the bottom, a group of travellers arrive at huts to take refreshments while two pilgrims climb up a steep path towards a man kneeling in prayer at a lattice window at the entrance to a cave dedicated to Kannon.

Yoshitsune's Horse-washing Falls at Yoshino in Yamato Province *Washū Yoshino Yoshitsune Uma-arai no taki*

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The mountainous region of Yoshino near the ancient capital of Nara, is celebrated for its natural beauty and historical importance. Rather than depict an actual location, Hokusai has taken an episode from the story of the historical general Minamoto no Yoshitsune who washed his favourite steed while hiding from his adversaries, the Taira clan, in the highlands of Yoshino. Hokusai has reinterpreted the scene by replacing the general with two peasants washing their prized horse. A feeling of depth has been created by the zigzagging flow of water, while the contrast between angular rocks and grassy surrounds adds additional movement to the tumbling waters.

The waterfall at Ono on the Kisokaidō Road

Kisokaidō Ono-no-bakufu

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Ono waterfall was a scenic site on the Kiso Valley stretch of the inland roadway between Edo and Kyoto. In this print the falling water is depicted as stylised thin blue and white vertical columns, in contrast to a more realistic illustration in volume VII of the *Hokusai Manga* published in 1817. A small Shinto shrine is perched on a rocky outcrop in the centre of the composition. Five travellers gaze up in awe of the natural spectacle as they cross a small bridge leading to a rest house, with rocks on its roof to hold the shingles in place against the waterfall's updraft.

The Rōben Falls at Ōyama in Sagami Province

Sōshū Ōyama Rōben no taki

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Rōben Waterfall is located at the base of Mt Ōyama south-west of Edo. The mountain was established as a sacred site after a stone statue of the protector of Buddhism, Fudō Myōō, was discovered there by the monk Rōben in 752. Pilgrims climbing the mountain were required to purify themselves by bathing at the same waterfall as Rōben. Historically, warriors would present real swords to the Ōyama god Sekison Gongen, but by the Edo period it was customary to present large wooden facsimile swords with the name Sekison Gongen inscribed on them, as seen in this print.

The falls at Aoigaoka in the eastern capital

Tōtō Aoigaoka no taki

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces* (*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Aoigaoka is the only man-made waterfall in Hokusai's *Waterfalls* series. It was a spillway at one end of Tameike Pond in the Akasaka district of Edo and part of the city's complex system of waterways. The picturesque waterfall featured a path at its side known as Aoigaoka (hollyhock slope) taking its name from the hollyhocks that flourished in the area. At the top of the hill we see a samurai with his attendant and in other places townsfolk carrying loads of produce in baskets. Two of Hokusai's comical-style figures in the foreground take a rest; one smoking a pipe and the other wiping his head.

The Care-of-the-aged Falls in Mino Province

Mino no kuni Yōrō no taki

from the *A Tour to the Waterfalls in Various Provinces* (*Shokoku taki meguri*) series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Yōrō Waterfall is north of Nagoya in the traditional papermaking region of Mino and associated with the mythical story 'Filial son of Yoro Waterfall' and the elixir of life. Before a thunderous flow of water, that sends up spray as it crashes into rocks, a samurai and his companion hold their hats to prevent them from blowing away in the updraft. Another group of travellers hide away from the wind and spray in small hut. To enhance the noise and movement around these figures, moving water is depicted at the waterfall's base as well as rapids that flow around a rocky outcrop.

A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry

Since the Heian period (794–1185), Japanese nobles and the samurai classes have admired Chinese literature and poetry. The Edo period (1600–1868) ushered in more than 260 years of peace and stability that gave rise to a financially empowered merchant class with a broad appreciation of the arts. A knowledge of Chinese and Japanese literature was pursued and enjoyed by this new culturally informed society and led to the publication of books and prints on these themes.

These prints, executed in the *nagaban* (narrow vertical print) format, resemble the shape of a small picture scroll. Rather than depicting landscapes based on actual locations, for this series Hokusai returned to his passion for literary, mythological and historical subjects and employed his compositional knowledge of *nanga* (Chinese Southern School painting), where depth is created by the use of a diagonally zigzagging structure of angles.

The series features historically acclaimed poets portrayed in imagined scenes inspired by their poems, or in real-life episodes for which they had become famous. Japanese and Chinese poets are featured in their respective countries, with the exception of the Japanese poet Abe no Nakamaro, depicted in China, and the Chinese poet Bai Juyi, shown visiting Japan.

Harumichi no Tsuraki

from the *A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika Shashin kyō*) series

1833–4

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

It is not clear from which poem Hokusai took his inspiration for this work, or if the scene shows Harumichi no Tsuraki himself, travelling through a landscape indicative of his poetry. It is speculated that we see the poet as a large figure dressed in Japanese noble attire being followed by two attendants, the younger carrying the poet's sword. They cross a swiftly flowing stream in their approach to a Japanese village nestled in front of a large mountain towering above distant fog.

Sei Shōnagon

from the *A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika Shashin kyō*) series

1833–4

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Sei Shōnagon was a Japanese author, poet and member of the imperial court. Hokusai has illustrated one of her poems about the escape of the Lord Mengchang from the ruthless King of Qin. Pursued by the king's army, Mengchang arrives at the edge of the Qin Kingdom to discover the gate closed for the night. In desperation, Mengchang imitates a rooster's morning cry, to which the gate swings open, and the group escapes. In Hokusai's composition Mengchang has arrived at the gate, one attendant climbs a tree to assess the situation and the other beats a drum. Two roosters can be seen on an ornate roof nearby.

Abe no Nakamaro

from the *A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika Shashin kyō*) series

1833–4

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Abe no Nakamaro was a Japanese scholar and poet of the Nara period (710–794). In 717 he visited China as part of a Japanese mission and remained there for the rest of his life. In this print we see him dressed in Japanese court costume, leaning on the railings of a balcony in China, accompanied by Chinese literary acquaintances. A magnificent eccentric scholar's rock and irregular pine tree break the straight lines of the architecture. While contemplating the moon, Abe no Nakamaro composes his most famous poem of melancholic nostalgia and yearning to return to his beloved home of Nara.

Young man setting out

Shōnen-kō

from the *A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika Shashin kyō*) series

1833–4

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Young man setting out is one of Hokusai's finest depictions of horses. It is a visualisation of a verse by the Tang dynasty poet Gui Guopu about a fashionable young man riding on a beautifully equipped horse. His dark headwear disguises him on his return from a secret visit to his lover in the pleasure districts of the capital Chang-an (Xi'an). A fisherman at the water's edge also hides his identity, and further along the path an elderly man with a tired horse looks back at the young, virile horse and rider who turns to look over his shoulder, remembering his romantic encounter of the previous evening.

Bai Juyi (Hakurakuten)

from the *A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika Shashin kyō*) series

1833–4

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Bai Juyi was a Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty whose influence over the Japanese court was considered a threat to local forms of poetry. Here, he has been sent to Japan by the emperor of China to subdue the Japanese through his poetry. Bai Juyi is met by two fishermen – one is the god of Japanese poetry Sumiyoshi in disguise. A poetry and dancing duel ensues. Sumiyoshi explains that in Japan, not only people but also nightingales and frogs compose poetry. Bai Juyi is so impressed that he returns to China on the breeze created by the swirling sleeves of his dancing Japanese acquaintances.

Traveller in snow

Yuki ni watarimono

from the *A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poetry*
(*Shiika Shashin kyō*) series

1833–4

colour woodblock

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by Mrs J. Ringland Anderson, 1972

AS11-1972

This work is the only one from the series that is not attributed to a poet. Scholars believe that the rider is the Song dynasty poet Su Shi (Su Dongpo), or the Tang dynasty essayist and poet Han Yu. In this dreamlike setting, cloaked in heavy snow, a rider in blue silk costume stops to take in the surreal view while his attendant looks up to listen to him compose a poem. The two evergreen pine trees that represent resilience through the cold and difficult days of winter are a metaphor for the two companions forging through a frozen landscape that appears to float in the air.

Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces

This group of eleven prints depicts the unique bridges a traveller might experience when visiting the major cities of Edo or Osaka; the picturesque surrounding areas of Kyoto; when travelling the famed Tōkaidō Road; while visiting the distant feudal domains of Iwakuni or Echizen; or when wandering through the remote mountainous regions of central Honshu.

Unlike works in *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* series, such as *The great wave off Kanagawa*, or Hokusai's waterfall prints, these images do not focus so much on dynamic compositions but instead poetically illustrate the locations and the humanity that surrounds bridges, and document the design of the bridges themselves. In contrast to the Mt Fuji series, many of the locations were in faraway regions and only known to the people of Edo through historical accounts and contemporary tales of travel. This allowed Hokusai the freedom to create stories and settings that were a combination of reality, historical literature and his personal imagination.

While many of the bridges depicted disappeared long ago, some even before Hokusai's time, the Togetsu Bridge, the Kintai Bridge and the Drum Bridge have all been reconstructed and can still be experienced in settings similar to those shown in Hokusai's scenes.

The suspension bridge on the border of Hida and Etchū provinces

Hietsu no sakai Tsuribashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

In what is considered one of the artist's most dramatic compositions, Hokusai has depicted a man and a woman dressed in humble indigo blue attire, traversing a narrow suspension bridge through a mythical landscape of vertical cliff faces and rocky pinnacles. The humble couple crossing a perilous ravine can be interpreted as a metaphor for the strength of the human relationship and the fragility of existence. Under the bridge a pair of wild geese, representing matrimonial contentment, return home, and on the far side of the bridge a male and female deer, recognised as divine messengers, graze peacefully on the hilltop.

For kids

Do you like a challenge? Are you afraid of heights? Would you walk across this suspension bridge with a very heavy backpack and someone bouncing you about?

Hokusai loved bridges and visited many of them. Here a couple cross a dangerous bridge in a dramatic landscape. How high up are they? What can you see below and around them? Can you spot the two deer and a pair of wild geese? In Japan, a pair of geese represent a happily married couple.

Old view of the pontoon bridge at Sano in Kōzuke Province

Kōzuke Sano funahashi-no-kozu

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

In this composition Hokusai has captured the silence and loneliness of travelling through a winter landscape. The pontoon bridge across the Tone River was the subject of historical literature, and as Hokusai indicates in the inscription on the work this is a 'former view', which he must have composed from historical accounts and his imagination. The current pushes the floating bridge into a huge ark as two travellers and a rider with attendant, covered with snow, cross to the opposite side. The diminishing scale of the figures and countless number of small boats supporting the bridge indicate its great length and the strength of the support ropes.

The Drum Bridge at Kameido Tenjin Shrine

Kameido Tenjin Taikobashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces* (*Shokoku meikyō kiran*) series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kameido Tenjin Shrine is famous for its trellises of wisteria; pond in the shape of the written character for 'heart'; and two exceptionally beautiful bridges – it was one of Edo's most popular sights and a favoured subject of *ukiyo-e* artists. Hokusai focuses on the perfect symmetry and immaculate construction of the larger of the two bridges, known as the Male bridge. A group of five figures, including a monk, ascend the steep bridge as three others reach the top. In the left of the print we see the so-called Male bridge's companion, the Female bridge, with three men standing by its railing enjoying the view.

Yahagi Bridge at Okazaki on the Tōkaidō Road

Tōkaidō Okazaki Yahagi no hashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Yahagi Bridge, at the town of Okazaki, was one of the few bridges permitted on the Tōkaidō Road. The length of its huge arch is confirmed by the tiny figures that throng from one side to the other. The seasonally fluctuating Yahagi River has almost dried up, and on the riverbed there are reams of fabric, recently made umbrellas and straw matting laid out to dry. Directly behind the bridge, a group of samurai compete in an archery competition. The crest and name of the shop of the publisher Eijudō appear on the banner surrounding the archers and the umbrellas under the bridge.

The Kintai Bridge in Suō Province

Suō no kuni Kintaibashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kintai Bridge, approximately forty kilometres west of Hiroshima, was constructed in 1673 to complement the approach to Iwakuni Castle. Its solid construction of wooden arches and stone piers using mortise and tenon joints allowed the bridge to withstand seasonal torrents for 276 years, until it was washed away by a typhoon in 1950. Kintai Bridge was reconstructed in 1953 and is still standing. In a dramatic image, clouds gather behind the castle, driving rain blows against figures in capes and rain hats and a samurai struggling with his umbrella is followed by attendants and a *hiyaku* (express foot messenger) with box attached to a shoulder stick.

The Hanging-cloud Bridge at Mt Gyōdō near Ashikaga

Ashikaga Gyōdōzan kumo no kakehashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces* (*Shokoku meikyō kiran*) series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Mt Gyōdō was located two or three days' walk north of Edo. The area was known for its esoteric Buddhist practices, and ascetic Buddhist monks had frequented it since the founding of Jōin-ji Temple in 714. Hokusai has created a fantastical landscape of rocky pinnacles; cloud-filled ravines; mountain pathways; temple buildings that include the prayer hall of Jōin-ji built into the cliff side; *Kumo no kakehashi* (cloud hanging bridge); and *Seishintei* (cleansed heart pavilion). One can imagine this as an ideal place for meditation and contemplating the natural surroundings. To subtly reference the print's title, Hokusai has included a cloud drifting whimsically over the bridge and into the distance.

Togetsu Bridge at Arashiyama in Yamashiro Province

Yamashiro Arashiyama Togetsukyō

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Arashiyama is an area west of Kyoto that has been popular since ancient times when nobles, literati, and townsfolk enjoyed its natural setting with Mt Arashiyama (stormy mountain) in the distance. Spanning the Hozu River in a graceful arch is the poetically named Togetsukyō Bridge (moon crossing bridge). An aristocratic woman with four attendants crosses the bridge, while two figures in the middle enjoy the view of cherry blossoms and two men on a bamboo raft drift downstream. The present-day bridge is similar in shape to the original and the setting of Arashiyama remains relatively unchanged.

Old view of the eight-part bridge at Yatsunashi in Mikawa Province

Mikawa no Yatsunashi no kozu

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Yatsunashi means ‘eight bridges’ and refers to a place in the ninth-century collection of verse and prose, the *Tales of Ise* by Ariwara no Narihira. The story’s protagonist stops at Yatsunashi, a place where a stream branches into eight channels, each with its own bridge. Crossing the bridges, the sight of irises prompts him to compose a nostalgic love poem, the first syllable of each line of which, when combined, forms the Japanese word for irises (*kakitsubata*). Although the original bridge ceased to exist some eight hundred years before Hokusai’s time, Yatsunashi style bridges were a common feature of iris ponds and paintings throughout the Edo period.

Fukui Bridge in Echizen Province

Echizen Fukui no hashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces*
(*Shokoku meikyō kiran*) series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Echizen is a province north of Kyoto famous for its handmade paper, and in the distance of this scene we can see freshly made paper stretched to dry on wooden planks. This print illustrates the historical story of two regional lords who construct a bridge in order to join their territories. One, a wealthy lord, constructed his half with masoned stone parts, and the other, more modest in his resources, constructed his half from wood. In the centre, a horse with the print publisher's mark on its blanket is stepping over the divide, its owner smiling at the sight of the bridge's unusual construction.

Tenman Bridge in Settsu Province

Sesshū Tenmanbashi

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Crossing the expansive Yodo River in a huge sweeping arch, Tenman Bridge was one of Osaka's busiest thoroughfares. This print highlights one of Japan's three greatest festivals: the Tenjin Matsuri, that has been held annually every summer for the last 1000 years. Seen at dusk, oil lamps illuminate the interiors of homes and restaurants along the riverside and a row of red lanterns echo the graceful curve of the bridge. Spectators line the bridge's railing to enjoy the cool evening air and to view the famous spectacle of festival boats with dancers, musicians and decorative lanterns, arranged into various formations, passing under Tenman Bridge.

Tenpōzan at the mouth of the Aji River in Settsu Province

Sesshū Ajigawa-guchi Tenpōzan

from the *Remarkable Views of Bridges in Various Provinces (Shokoku meikyō kiran)* series

c. 1834

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Mt Tenpōzan is a man-made hill created in 1831 at the mouth of the Aji River in Osaka. Landscaped into waterways and gardens, the place was a popular destination for city folk to visit, meet friends and relax in tea houses. Rather than featuring a single bridge, Hokusai has illustrated the entire park with cherry blossoms and tiny figures wandering about on pathways, ascending and descending the hill and passing over two small bridges. The inscription, 'Copied on commission from a picture of Osaka', indicates Hokusai may have not visited the location but created this work from a description and drawings.

One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse

This last major series of prints created by Hokusai is based on Japan's best known anthology of poems, the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*, compiled by the nobleman and poet Fujiwara no Teika in 1235. Visual interpretations of poems from the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* had traditionally been formalised depictions of court life, or portraits of the poets themselves dressed in classical costume. Hokusai, however, had egalitarian ideals and filled many of his scenes with ordinary people engaging in daily chores and rejoicing in the simple pleasures of life.

Hokusai was a highly literate man, and while enjoying the classical interpretation of these verses must also have relished their phonetic potential for double meanings. To explain these new interpretations, he invented an unlikely visual orator, 'The nurse' – a wet nurse, or surrogate mother for an infant. While the formal poem appears in the patterned cartouche in the upper right of each print, the ever-caring surrogate mother (perhaps representing Hokusai himself) visually retells the poem not within the strict conventions of ancient Japan but with the sincerity and loving maternal care of a wet nurse who is interpreting the verses to us – children of the modern age.

Emperor Tenchi (Tenchi Tennō)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Coarse the rush-mat roof / Sheltering the harvest-hut / Of
the autumn rice-field / And my sleeves are growing wet /
With the moisture dripping through.’

This poem describes the seventh-century Emperor Tenchi taking shelter from the rain in a small makeshift hut used for storing and keeping the new harvest dry. Through the rush mat roof, water drips onto his sleeve, inspiring him to compose a poem in which his damp sleeve represents his tears shed in sorrow for the demanding existence and hardships experienced by his subjects. Hokusai’s scene does not include the Emperor, but the common people he alludes to in his poem.

Empress Jitō (Jitō Tennō)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Spring, it seems, has passed. / And the summer come
again / For the silk-white robes / So ’tis said, are spread to
dry / On the ‘Mount of Heaven’s Perfume.’

Empress Jitō ruled during the late seventh century and was the third of only eight women to assume the role of Empress Regent. Referencing the arrival of warm summer days, Empress Jitō describes the practice of laying her finest white clothes outdoors to air after being in storage during the damp winter months. Hokusai has transported the scene into the Edo period, with travellers crossing the river and local village folk washing their linen.

Kakinomoto no Hitomaro

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Ah! the foot-drawn trail / Of the mountain-pheasant’s tail
/ Drooped like down-curved branch! / Through this long,
long-dragging night / Must I keep my couch alone?’

Kakinomoto no Hitomaro lived between the late seventh and early eighth century, and is known for his godlike status among ancient poets. This verse compares an arduous solo overnight mountain journey to that of a sleepless night. The pheasant mentioned refers to a Japanese belief that these wild birds spend each evening wandering the mountains alone. Hokusai’s rural setting subtly references the mountain-pheasant’s tail through the curving plume of smoke, and the arduous mountain journey with the farmers dragging a fishing net.

Yamabe no Akahito

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘When to Tago’s coast / I the way have gone, and see /
Perfect whiteness laid / On Mt Fuji’s lofty peak / By the
drift of falling snow.’

Yamabe no Akahito was a poet of the Nara period (710–794). This poem notes Akahito’s wonderment when he viewed Mt Fuji, perhaps for the first time, while on a journey with the emperor. Throughout history, the Tago coast has inspired artists. In this composition the scene is transported 1000 years into the future to the Edo period and depicts a privileged traveller in a palanquin with porters and attendants rounding a mountain path with inspiring views of a snow-capped Mt Fuji.

Saramaru Dayū

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

'In the mountain depths / Treading through the crimson
leaves / Cries the wandering stag / When I hear the lonely
cry / Sad, how sad the autumn is!'

Sarumaru Dayū lived during the eighth century in the mountains north of Kyoto. His reference to the cry of a mating male deer evokes the melancholia felt by a yearning lover and the arrival of cool winter days. In the Japanese poem the sound of the word used for voice, *koi*, can also mean love, and *toki* can mean outcry, as well as time. Hokusai's composition shows a group of women returning home after a day's work and two deer in the distance

Chūnagon Yakamochi (Ōtomo no Yakamochi)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* (*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘If the ‘Magpie Bridge’ / Bridge by flight of magpies
spanned / White with frost I see / With a deep-laid frost
made white / Late, I know, has grown the night.’

Ōtomo no Yakamochi was a poet, military general and politician during the eighth century. This poem references the folktale of two young lovers who were banished to opposite sides of the Milky Way and only permitted to meet once a year by crossing a bridge formed by the wings of magpies. It is rumoured that the poet was having an affair and could only secretly meet his lover at a place known as the Magpie Bridge, before the early morning frost would melt.

Abe no Nakamaro

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘When I look abroad / O’er the wide-stretched ‘Plain of
Heaven’ / Is the moon the same / That on Mount Mikasa
rose / In the land of Kasuga?’

Abe no Nakamaro was a poet of the eighth century who as a teenager travelled to China, where he remained for the rest of his life. Mt Mikasa and Kasuga refer to important sites of his home town of Nara. In Hokusai’s composition Abe no Nakamaro appears in Japanese-period costume, gazing across the lake eastwards, from China towards Japan, and with the reflection of the full moon before him composes his poem of homesickness.

Ono no Komachi

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Colour of the flower / Has already passed away / While
on trivial things / Vainly I have set my gaze / In my journey
through the world.’

Ono no Komachi is one of Japan’s most celebrated female poets. In this poem, she compares the colour of flowers to a woman’s facial beauty, and the fading of the colour is invoked as an analogy for her own ageing. Here we see cherry blossoms in full bloom, and an entire village busy with chores. In the centre, Hokusai has shown an old woman gazing at the pristine cherry blossoms; beside her a man sweeps up the fallen petals.

Sangi Takamura (Ono no Takamura)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘O’er the wide, wide sea / Towards its many distant isles /
Rowing I set forth. / This, to all the world proclaim / O ye
boats of fisher-folk!’

Ono no Takamura was a ninth-century poet, scholar, sometime personal counsellor to the Emperor and adoptive father of poet Ono no Komachi. At one time during his chequered career, Takamura was banished to the rocky, isolated Eighty Islands (Oki Islands) for two years. This poem is his defiant farewell, written on the eve of his departure. In the print we see Ono no Takamura’s boat departing into the distance, and abalone divers in the foreground.

Sōjō Henjō (Yoshimine no Munesada)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘O ye Winds of Heaven! / In the paths among the clouds /
Blow, and close the ways / That we may these virgin forms
/ Yet a little while detain.’

Yoshimine no Munesada was an officer in charge of Emperor Ninmyō’s imperial court. This poem was inspired by the Niiname Festival, during which the first harvested rice is offered to the gods in gratitude for the year’s abundant crop. As part of the ceremony, young unmarried women perform a ritualised dance. The poem compares their beauty to floating angels travelling amid the clouds. The poet asks the winds to close the clouds and prevent the angels from returning to heaven.

Ariwara no Narihira Ason

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

'I have never heard / That, e'en when the gods held sway /
In the ancient days / E'er was water bound with red / Such
as here in Tatsuta's stream.'

Ariwara no Narihira was a famous military general, poet and romantic of the nineteenth century. His diaries are considered to have formed the *Ise Monogatari* (*Tales of Ise*). The Tatsuta River near Nara is a celebrated autumn location famous for maple leaves flowing in its current. In Hokusai's scene aristocratic figures have been replaced with farmers, a husband and wife with child, and pair of jovial travellers.

Ise

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Even for a space / Short as joint of tiny reed / From
Naniwa’s marsh / We must never meet again / In this life?
This, do you ask?’

Lady Ise, born in 875, was regarded as a great poet and scholar. This poem is a reply to a lover. She compares a very short period of time to the tiny space found at the joint of a reed. In the final line she poses the fatalistic question, ‘To never meet again in this life, is this what you ask?’ In the house two women appear to await the arrival of a special guest, maybe a potential suiter or Lady Ise’s lover.

Fujiwara no Toshiyuki Ason

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Lo! the gathered waves / On the shore of Sumi’s bay! /
E’en in gathered night / When in dreams I go to thee / I
must shun the eyes of men.’

Fujiwara no Toshiyuki Ason was a nobleman of the Fujiwara family during the tenth century. This poem refers to the coast of Sumi, a district of Osaka famous for its shrine to seafarers. The reference to waves on the shore and the gathered night symbolise the poet’s dream of approaching his lover under cover of darkness, so as not to disclose their affair. The open hatch on the ship allows us to perhaps catch a glimpse of the secret lovers.

Motoyoshi Shinnō

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Now, in dire distress / It is all the same to me! / So, then,
let us meet / Even though it costs my life / the Bay of
Naniwa.’

Prince Motoyoshi was famous for his many romantic adventures, and this poem describes one such encounter that he is willing to risk his life for. The Japanese word for ‘it costs my life’ also means the stakes used as tide gauges. In Hokusai’s composition we see the coastal tide gauges and two women, possibly the lover and her attendant, hiding behind umbrellas. The ox may carry the prince himself, secretly enclosed within the bundles on the ox’s back.

Kan Ke (Sugawara no Michizane)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘At the present time / Since no offering I could bring / See,
Mount Tamuke! / Here are brocades of red leaves / At the
pleasure of the god.’

Sugawara no Michizane was a calligrapher, scholar and politician of the ninth century. On a journey he made with the retired Emperor Uda to Mt Tamuke, Michizane forgot to take the appropriate offering of a bundle of sticks bound with brocade paper inscribed with prayers. On his arrival at Mt Tamuke, Uda was overwhelmed by the beauty of the autumn leaves that appeared like a brocade decorating the mountains and composed a poem as his offering.

Teishin Kō (Fujiwara no Tadahira)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘If the maple leaves / On the ridge of Ogura / Have
the gift of mind / They will longingly await / One more
August pilgrimage.’

Fujiwara no Tadahira and his two sons held three of the most powerful positions in the imperial court during the early tenth century. This poem was written at the request of the abdicated Emperor Uda, who had become a Buddhist monk, and invites his son, the current Emperor Daigo, to view the autumn colours of Mt Ogura. In Hokusai’s visualisation of the story we see the retired Emperor Uda in monk’s robes bowing to greet his son in the centre.

Minamoto no Muneyuki Ason

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Winter loneliness / In a mountain hamlet grows / Only
deeper, when / Guests are gone, and leaves and grass /
Withered are; so runs my thought.’

Minamoto Muneyuki, who died in 939, was a nobleman and the grandson of Emperor Kōkō. The wavering lines of the smoke plume moving to the left, suddenly blown in the opposite direction by a change of wind, makes this one of Hokusai’s most dynamic compositions in the series. In the frozen landscape of white, grey and black the group of five men, who appear to be hunters, celebrate the warmth of the fire.

Harumichi no Tsuraki

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

'In a mountain stream / Builided by the busy wind / Is
a wattled-barrier drawn. / Yet 'tis only maple leaves /
Powerless
to flow away.'

Very little is known about Tsuraki apart from his appointment as governor to Iki Province and his death before assuming the position. The poem describes autumn leaves in a river being pushed against a barrier – an analogy for Tsuraki's feeling of being unable to control his own destiny. In this composition, carpenters cut wood in a similar style to that in Hokusai's print *In the Tōtōmi mountains*, and a mother leads her son with his pet tortoise.

Kiyowara no Fukayabu

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘In the summer night / While the evening still seems here
/ Lo! the dawn has come. / In what region of the clouds /
Has the wandering moon found place?’

Kiyowara no Fukayabu was from a renowned family of tenth and eleventh-century writers. This poem refers to the short nights of summer, and as dawn arrives the author asks, ‘Has the moon already set or is it just hiding behind the clouds?’ Hokusai depicts a leisurely Edo-period boating scene on Sumida River. Customers can be seen in *yakatabune* (leisure boats) enjoying sake and food, and in the foreground two men are charcoal-grilling food and washing dishes.

Bunya no Asayasu (Fumiya no Asayasu)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* (*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘In the autumn fields / When the heedless wind blows by /
O’er the pure-white dew / How the myriad unstrung gems
/ Everywhere are scattered round!’

Bunya no Asayasu lived during the late ninth and early tenth centuries. This poem describes early morning dewdrops that are found when autumn days cool towards winter. In Hokusai’s superb composition we see a group of five figures in a boat, wearing kimonos tucked into *hakama* trousers, struggling with punting poles against a strong wind while collecting lotus leaves. Subtly illustrated around the boat are pearl-like dewdrops scattered across the lotus leaves and surface of the pond.

Sangi Hitoshi (Minamoto no Hitoshi)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Bamboo-growing plain / With a small-field bearing reeds!
/ Though I bear my lot / Why is it too much to bear? / Why
do I still love her so?’

Sangi Hitoshi was a member of the powerful tenth-century Minamoto family. Hitoshi laments for a lost love, exclaiming that it is ‘all too much to bear’. In response to this, Hokusai has created a suitably melancholic scene featuring a regional official, most likely Hitoshi himself, with head lowered, making a lonely provincial journey. Two farmers prostrate themselves as he approaches. The playful group of children perhaps represents the official’s longing for a carefree life.

Ōnakatomi no Yoshinobu Ason

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Like the warder’s fires / At the Imperial gateway kept /
Burning through the night / Through the day in ashes
dulled / Is the love aglow in me.’

Ōnakatomi no Yoshinobu Ason was an official in the imperial court during the tenth century. The poet uses the warmth of a fire as an analogy for his affectionate feelings towards his sweetheart. The gateway, guarded by warders, may indicate that his lover is a courtesan of the emperor, and his affections are forbidden. Hokusai’s spring scene shows the warders stretching comically by the fire and the poet, with a young attendant, gazing into the distance, longing for his lover.

Fujiwara no Yoshitaka

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘For thy precious sake / Once my (eager) life itself / Was
not dear to me. / But ’tis now my heart’s desire / It may
long, long years endure.’

Yoshitaka of the influential Fujiwara clan died at the age of twenty-one in 974. His poem expresses that either he would like to live forever now that he has found love, or that he felt as though love held more meaning than life. Hokusai has interpreted the enduring, sentimental feeling of love with a scene of Edo-period townsfolk relaxing in a bathhouse, with one woman standing in the classical curved pose of a *ukiyo-e* beauty.

Fujiwara no Michinobu Ason

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin issshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Though I know full well / That the night will come again /
E’en when day has dawned / Yet, in truth, I hate the sight /
Of the morning’s coming light.’

Fujiwara no Michinobu Ason was a tenth-century poet who died at the age of twenty-three. His poem is filled with the passion, lust and impatience of a young romantic who dislikes being separated from his lover at daybreak. Hokusai has reinterpreted the poem with an early-morning Edo-period scene. At first light, teams of palanquin bearers can be seen shuttling home guests who had stayed overnight with their lover in Edo’s Yoshiwara entertainment district.

Sanjō In

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse*
(*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

'If, against my wish / In the world of sorrows still / I for long
should live / How then I would pine, alas! / For this moon
of middle-night.'

Sanjō In was the sixty-seventh emperor of Japan and reigned for only four years, from 1012 to 1016, before being forced from office. It is thought that in this poem, Sanjō In expresses the difficulties he is experiencing with the political power games of regents in the imperial court. He contemplates the tranquillity and beauty of the moon, and remembers the simplicity and pleasures of his previous life. Hokusai's print illustrates an autumnal full-moon shrine ritual.

Dainagon Tsunenobu (Minamoto no Tsunenobu, Katsura no Dainagon)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* (*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘When the evening comes / From the rice leaves at my gate / Gentle knocks are heard / And, into my round rush-hut / Autumn’s roaming breeze makes way.’

Dainagon Tsunenobu was an eleventh-century statesman. In Japan people sensed the changing seasons through their observation of flora and fauna and seasonal sounds and sensations. This poem suggests the arrival of autumn as experienced in a farmer’s hut by the sound of wind against leaves at the hut’s gate, and then the hut’s door. Hokusai created a similar mood with migrating birds seen in the distance and Autumn wind blowing towards a group of farmers.

Gonchūnagon Sadaie (Fujiwara no Sadaie, Fujiwara no Teika)

from the *One Hundred Poems Explained by the Nurse* (*Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*) series

1835–36

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

‘Like the salt sea-weed / Burning in the evening calm / On Matsuo’s shore / All my being is aglow/ Waiting one who does not come.’

Fujiwara no Teika was a poet and novelist of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. His greatest legacy is the compilation of the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu* anthology of poems – a cornerstone of Japanese literature and the subject of Hokusai’s series. The poem describes waiting for someone who does not come and workers burning seaweed to extract salt. Hokusai’s illustrates the coastal scene of seaweed burners, the warmth of Teika’s passion visualised in the red-brown and grey plume of smoke.

Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands

The Ryūkyū Kingdom ruled an archipelago that stretched from just south of Japan's southernmost island, Kyushu, to the Sakishima Islands near Taiwan. The kingdom played a key role in maritime trade between South-East Asia, China, Korea and Japan, maintaining a semi-independent status by cultivating diplomatic relations with China from the fourteenth century onwards, and pledging itself as a vassal state of the Satsuma Domain of Japan in the seventeenth century.

In the tenth month of 1832 a delegation of more than two hundred members from the Ryūkyū Kingdom visited Edo. The occasion was celebrated with a parade of exotically dressed officials, attendants and musicians through the streets of the city, which led to a surge of public interest in the mysterious southern kingdom. In response, Hokusai and his publishers conceived a series of eight prints introducing the Ryūkyū islands. Hokusai never visited the islands, and based his compositions on a group of simple black-and-white illustrations published the previous year in *An Encyclopaedia of the Ryūkyū Kingdom*. These images were copied from a series of eight scenic sites, accompanied by poems inspired by Ryūkyū port city of Naha, in the Chinese book *Brief History of the Ryūkyū Kingdom* by Zhou Huang (1757).

Bamboo grove at Kumemura

Beison no chikuri

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kumemura was a walled district on the island of Ukishima, connected to Naha town by the Izumizaki Bridge and Chōkōtei embankment. Known as a place of Confucian learning, Kumemura was a community of scholars, bureaucrats and diplomats believed to be descendants of the Chinese immigrants who settled there in 1392. Over the generations they served as government officials at home and as diplomats in relations with China, Japan and Korea. Amongst misty clouds the scholars' gardens are filled with lush bamboo, and tiny figures can be seen sweeping the waterside promenade and in a small boat in the foreground.

Sunset glow at Jungai

Jungai sekishō

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)* series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Sunset glow at Jungai depicts a high bluff overlooking the ocean that was a sacred site of the native Ryūkyūan religion. Known as *Naminoue-gū* (shrine above the waves) in Japanese, and *Hana gusuku* and *Nanminsan* in the Ryūkyūan language, the site was dedicated to a mythical place known as Nirai Kanai, the source of all life, and the underwater realm of the Dragon or Sea King. At the base of the slope leading to the main shrine is a smaller shrine with a *torii* gate. This is the only site in the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands* series that remains recognisable today.

Night moon at Izumizaki

Izumizaki yagetsu

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Izumizaki-bashi is a bridge that connected central Naha with the village of Kumemura on Ukishima Island. On the right side is the Confucian shrine of Kumemura, a popular meeting place and point of entry to the island. Originally made of wood, Izumizaki-bashi was replaced with a stone bridge in 1717 that appears in this print. Two small cargo boats, which would lower their masts to pass under the bridge, are moored in the bottom right. The bridge was destroyed in the Second World War and replaced in 1958 with a modern construction one hundred metres downstream.

The sacred fountain at Castle Peak

Jōgaku reisen

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Castle Peak was located in the area of Izumizaki and provided views of Naha town. Despite its name, the site was not associated with a castle but was regarded as an *utaki* – a sacred site of the Ryūkyūan religion that can be a grove, cave, formation of rocks or a mountain. Flowing from the mountain was a natural spring noted for its purity and sweet taste. The spring water most likely stopped flowing prior to the production of Hokusai's print. During the twentieth century, city development encroached on the area but in recent years it has been returned to natural parkland.

Pines and waves at the Dragon Cavern

Ryūdō shōtō

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This composition is unusual insofar as it depicts a snow-covered scene, which was implausible for the semitropical location of the Ryūkyū Islands. Although the reason for Hokusai's inclusion of snow is not known, possible explanations are that he was reproducing the snow a Ryūkyūan delegation experienced in Edo; referencing the classic Song dynasty theme 'Eight Views of Xiao and Xiang' that included snowscapes; or trying to emphasise the exotic nature of the location. Two temple buildings in the centre and foreground known as Ryūdō-ji no longer exist. During the twentieth century the area was reclaimed from the sea, and is currently known as Onoyama Park.

Banana garden at Nakashima

Chūtō shōen

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Nakashima was a pleasure district located on a tiny reclaimed island connected to the town of Naha by a small bridge. Popular with aristocrats fond of poetry and literature, it was a place associated with the most famous Ryūkyūan female poet, Yoshiya Chiruu. The area was known for its banana tree gardens and large natural eccentric-shaped rocks, called *Nakashima nu ufuishi* (large stones of Nakashima), several of which can be seen in the foreground. This area has now been completely reclaimed from the sea, and one of the large stones can be found beside Naha bus terminal.

The sound of the lake at Rinkai

Rinkai kosei

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Rinkai-ji was a Buddhist temple associated with the Shingon sect, located on a spit of land in Naha Bay. A zigzagging causeway was extended beyond the temple to give access to the Mie Gusuku Fortress, built on a small rocky outcrop to guard the port's entrance. *Rinkai-ji* literally means 'temple beside the sea', which is an appropriate name given its location. A bell known as the *Ippon-gongen* bell is said to have been cast and hung at Rinkai-ji. The title of this work refers to the temple's name and the beautiful resonating sound of its bell.

Clear autumn weather at Chōkō

Chōkō shūsei

from the *Eight Views of the Ryūkyū Islands (Ryūkyū hakkei)*
series

c. 1832

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The Chōkōtei (Long Rainbow Embankment) was a one-kilometre causeway and set of seven stone bridges connecting the small Naha port of Tomari with the chief port of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, located on the small island of Ukishima. Although the Chinese illustration Hokusai used as a model illustrated only six bridges, his print clearly notes the seven arched bridges. Hokusai has also added two exotic Chinese-style boats in the foreground, and a Mt Fuji-esque mountain on the horizon. The Chōkōtei was gradually made redundant by roads constructed during the early twentieth century, and its remaining sections were destroyed during the Second World War.

Birds and flowers

Throughout Hokusai's career, birds and flowering plants appeared in his prints, poetry albums and paintings as subtle indicators of the seasons and coded messages to suggest emotions. The depictions of flowering plants that Hokusai made until his seventies follow the classical Chinese traditions of Song dynasty paintings. However, during the early 1830s he released two series of *kachō-e* (pictures of birds and flowers) that reinterpreted this 800-year-old tradition, using the powerful graphic qualities and translucent pigments of Japanese *ukiyo-e* printmaking to yield outstanding results.

Prints in the first series, known as *Large Flowers*, are in the horizontal *oban* (large sheet) format. In general, the flowers are positioned centrally and include one bird or insect, with Hokusai's signature being the only inscription. The second series of prints, known as *Small Flowers*, are in the more intimate *chuban* (half sheet) format and match species of flowers with birds in seasonal settings. The names of the birds and flowers are inscribed on each sheet, and Japanese or Chinese poems enhance the contemplative settings. Hokusai's great ability to capture animals' movement enabled him to illustrate many of the birds swooping and darting in flight – a skill unrivalled by other Japanese artists.

Peonies and butterfly

Botan ni chō

from an untitled series known as *Large Flowers*

1833–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Chrysanthemums and horsefly

Kiku ni abu

from an untitled series known as *Large Flowers*

1833–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Hydrangeas and swallow

Ajisai ni tsubame

from an untitled series known as *Large Flowers*

1833–34

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Warbler and roses

Kōchō bara

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Wisteria and wagtail

Fuji sekirei

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*
c. 1834, printed late 19th century
colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Shrike and bluebird with begonia and wild strawberry

Mozu ruri yuki-no-shita

hebi-ichigo

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Bullfinch and weeping cherry

Uso shidarezakura

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kingfisher with iris and wild pinks

Kawasemi shaga nadeshiko

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Java sparrow on magnolia

Bunchō kobushi no hana

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Peonies and canary

Shakuyaku kanaari

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Cuckoo and azaleas

Hototogisu satsuki

from an untitled series known as *Small Flowers*

c. 1834, printed late 19th century

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Snow, Moon and Flowers

This set of three poetic landscape prints shows scenes immediately recognisable, at the time of their creation, to the print-buying populace of Japan: the Sumida River in Edo; the Yodo River in Japan's other great metropolis, Osaka; and the hills of Yoshino, near Nara. Within these famous settings, Hokusai has masterfully presented depictions of snow, the moon and flowers. This trio of motifs, known as *setsu-getsu-ka*, was a favourite in Chinese Tang dynasty poetry, which Hokusai and the cultivated merchant classes of Edo-period Japan were passionately fond of.

Together, *setsu-getsu-ka* represent the four seasons: snow indicating winter; the moon representing autumn; and flowers for either spring or summer. *Setsu-getsu-ka* could also represent three different kinds of white: bluish white for winter, signifying snow; a warmer white for autumn, representing the harvest moon; and a pinkish white for spring and summer, when the favoured flower was cherry blossom. These motifs were a popular theme in *ukiyo-e*, and as well as in landscapes, and were often referenced in prints of beautiful women or kabuki scenes.

Snow on the Sumida River

Sumida

from the *Snow, Moon and Flowers*

(*setsu-getsu-ka*) series

c. 1833

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Snow on the Sumida River displays a chill wintry scene with trees bowed by heavy snow lining the river in the foreground, upon which a lone boat floats. Here the hunched figure of a fisherman sits so patiently even his straw coat and hat are covered in snow, while in the distance two similar figures trudge towards the warmth of their hut. Although there is no suggestion of a specific view of the Sumida River in Edo, the small snow-covered shrine on the right-hand side may be part of Mokubo-ji, a site that Hokusai featured in several other prints.

Moonlight on the Yodo River

Yodogawa

from the *Snow, Moon and Flowers*

(*setsu-getsu-ka*) series

c. 1833

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Moonlight on the Yodo River features an autumnal harvest moon rising over distant hills, and a layer of evening mist forming over paddy fields. Two boats are punted past the huge stone walls of Osaka Castle, while others are pulled upstream by teams of boat trackers doubled over by effort. The zigzagging formation of the boats matches the straight lines describing the castle walls and tower. The roof of the castle is decorated with *shachihoko* – mythical animals with the head of a tiger and the body of a carp that were believed to evoke rain and prevent destruction from fires.

Cherry blossoms at Yoshino

Yoshino

from the *Snow, Moon and Flowers*

(*setsu-getsu-ka*) series

c. 1833

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Cherry blossoms at Yoshino depicts the densely flowering cherry trees on the hills of Yoshino, a scene immediately familiar to many Japanese as the area where the Heian general Yoshitsune hid from his enemies in the Kabuki play *Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*. A vast pinkish-white area shows a sea of cloudy blossoms, at the lower edges of which a group of pilgrims make their way to one of Yoshino's many shrines further up the hill. Two figures in the right foreground carry provisions, perhaps for a picnic among the cherry trees, which are at the height of their beauty during early spring.

One Hundred Ghost Stories

A popular theme in storytelling, folk traditions, religion and the performing arts throughout Japanese history is a belief in ghosts, demons and the supernatural. During the Edo period a new form of theatre named kabuki often featured performances concerning love, betrayal, murder and ghostly reprisals based on real events that had become urban folklore and intrigued the scandal-loving middle classes. It is on these popular stories that Hokusai based his gruesome *One Hundred Ghost Stories* series of prints, c. 1831.

A favourite story-telling parlour game of the Edo period was *Hyaku Monogatari Kaidankai* (One Hundred Ghostly Stories Get-together). Participants would gather after dark in a room lit by 100 lamps. As each story was completed, one lamp was blown out. As the room gradually darkened, the participants' imaginations thrilled with expectation, and when the final tale was completed and the final lamp extinguished it was said a supernatural phenomenon would occur.

Due to their popularity, ghost stories have been collected and published as books, *ukiyo-e* prints, children's card games and, from the twentieth century, as manga comic books, cartoon series, television dramas and films. Hokusai's five ghost story prints remain some of the most evocative and spinechilling examples in this unique genre of Japanese art.

Memorial Anniversary

Shūnen

from the *One Hundred Ghost Stories (Hyaku monogatari)*
series

c. 1831

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

This composition features an *ihai* (memorial tablet) and table of specially prepared sweets, in a conventional Buddhist offering to the deceased. In the spiritual realm snakes were interpreted to be the soul of the departed who only returned to this world when they felt a deep attachment to or jealous obsession with someone or something. The memorial tablet is inscribed with a Sanskrit character in the shape of an elderly face, and an inscription with the double meaning of '100', as well as 'forest-dwelling ghost with the appearance of an old man'. Because Hokusai was obsessed with surpassing the age of 100, it is thought to be a disguised self-portrait.

The mansion of the plates

Sara yashiki

from the *One Hundred Ghost Stories (Hyaku monogatari)*
series

c. 1831

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The samurai Aoyama Tessan accuses his housemaid Okiku of breaking one plate from a valuable set of ten. Aoyama is enraged when Okiku maintains her innocence, murders her and disposes of her body in a well. Thereafter, night after night, Okiku's voice is heard from the depths of the well, mournfully counting from one to nine, after which she lets out a chilling cry. In Hokusai's scene we see the ghost of Okiku gradually creeping out of the well as she counts the plates. Her neck, made of the plates, looks like that of a *rokurokubi* (long-necked demonic ghost). The tale of Okiku influenced the contemporary Japanese ghost story *The Ring*.

For kids

Who is this ghost rising out of a well at night? Look at her long, strangely shaped neck. What lies underneath her long wet hair?

In this print Hokusai tells the story of Okiku – a servant to the samurai Aoyama who was looking after ten very special plates. Aoyama's wife accidentally broke one, threw it in a well and blamed Okiku. Aoyama locked up Okiku and treated her terribly. She escaped and in despair threw herself in a well and drowned. Every night afterwards Okiku's spooky voice was heard tormenting Aoyama.

Imagine telling this story in the dark with your friends – scary!

The ghost of Oiwa

Oiwa-san

from the *One Hundred Ghost Stories (Hyaku monogatari)*
series

c. 1831

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The main character in 'The mysterious story of Yotsuya' is the virtuous Oiwa who is married to Tamiya Iemon, a struggling samurai turned umbrella maker. Iemon falls in love with his young neighbour Oume whose father administers a potion to Oiwa that awfully disfigures her. Iemon is disgusted and wants a divorce, but in despair Oiwa kills herself instead. Later, Iemon marries Oume but is tricked by the ghost of Oiwa into killing his new wife. Iemon rushes away in horror and takes refuge in a temple. In the middle of the night, Oiwa's horrific, deformed face appears in an old torn temple lantern, as depicted in this scene. Driven to insanity, Iemon takes his own life.

Laughing demoness

Warai Hannya

from the *One Hundred Ghost Stories (Hyaku monogatari)*
series

c. 1831

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Here Hokusai has combined two kinds of terrifying creatures, Hannya and Yamauba, into one demonic incarnation. Hannya are women who have been transformed into vengeful demons by the torments of jealousy and betrayal. Horns protrude from their foreheads, and fang-like teeth grow from their upper jaws. Yamauba (mountain women) are old women who live alone in isolated mountain regions. Stories of Yamauba – in which a kindly old woman appears offering shelter, food and a place to sleep to weary travellers, only to pursue her passion for human flesh at the midnight hour – were popular among travellers during the Edo period. In this print one such creature, with a taste for the flesh of human children, clutches the severed head of a baby.

The ghost of Kohada Koheiji

Kohada Koheiji

from the *One Hundred Ghost Stories (Hyaku monogatari)*
series

c. 1831

colour woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Kohada Koheiji was one of the few male ghosts popular during the Edo period. Koheiji was a struggling kabuki actor who, through lack of talent, was only ever cast in the roles of ghosts. His wife Otsuka was embarrassed by her husband's career and switched her affections to Koheiji's fellow actor Adachi Sakurō. While on tour, Sakurō and Otsuka killed Koheiji and dumped his body in a swamp. Rising from the swamp, Koheiji returned to Edo as a ghost to terrorise the devious couple. Here Otsuka and her lover wake at night to see the skeletal apparition of Koheiji slowly claw back their mosquito net and peer down at them with vengeful intent.

Hokusai Manga

The fifteen volumes of Hokusai's *Manga*, comprising more than 800 pages and almost 4000 motifs, are a veritable visual encyclopedia of the daily life and flourishing culture of Edo-period Japan. The artist's whimsical and socially astute observations of nature, inventions, architecture, historical figures and mythology are both entertaining and culturally enlightening.

In 1814 the first volume of *Denshin Kaishu: Hokusai Manga (Education of Beginners through the Spirit of Things: Random Sketches by Hokusai)* was published. Its title suggests that the book was originally intended as a painting manual for artists wanting to gain knowledge of Hokusai's spontaneity and genius. However, the *Manga's* comical nature had great appeal to the general public. Nine additional volumes were published between 1815 and 1819, and further volumes were created in c. 1833, 1834 and 1849, with two final editions produced posthumously – in c. 1850 and 1878.

The *Hokusai Manga* provide an insight into the artist's fascination with the more unusual and bizarre fringes of society. Depictions of contortionists, magic tricks, ghosts, monsters, funny faces and dance instructions, a man submerged under water in a large glass bottle and drunken party games reveal an eccentric side of the artist.

For kids

Imagine filling a book with your own drawings of the world around you. During his life and afterwards, Hokusai, his friends and publishers gathered his pictures together to form fifteen *manga* books. *Manga* means 'random drawings made with brush and ink', and the books made Hokusai very famous.

Look carefully at the pages on display. Can you find people fighting, swimming, dancing and practising martial arts? Can you see crazy-looking deep-sea creatures, giant leaves that cover an adult, contortionists, magicians, sumo wrestlers and a three-eyed ogre? Be warned! The more you look the more you see.

Tradesmen, fishermen, warehouses and street brawling

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. I

1814

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134A-4

Deep sea creatures

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. II

1815

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134B-4

Yakko-odori, the servants' dance

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. III

1815

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134C-4

Swimmers, floatation devices, man in a bottle and forging a river by horse

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. IV

1816

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1954

3134D-4

Temple gate design

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. V

1816

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134E-4

Popular self-defence and escape techniques

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. VI

1817

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134F-4

Akita giant butterbur

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. VII

1817

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134G-4

Acrobats and contortionists

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. VIII

1818

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134H-4

Sumo dandies at their daily chores

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. IX

1819

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134I-4

Magic tricks

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. X

1819

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1954

3134J-4

Bishamonten with eight swords

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. XI

1833

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Rokurokubi long necked ghosts, the three eyed ogre and the shamisen player

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. XII

1834

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1954

3134K-4

Three headed Daikokuten

Dragon with the sword of Fudō Myōō

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. XIII

1849

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Wolf and the full moon

Cat with mouse

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. XIV

1850

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Morning glory, Chinese trumpet vine and red ivy

illustration in *Hokusai Manga* Vol. XV

1878

book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji

Hokusai's three-volume *One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji*, published in 1834, 1835 and c. 1839, respectively, is acknowledged as his most complete homage to any one subject, and is one of the great masterpieces in the history of book illustration. These volumes are different from his single-sheet colour prints of Mt Fuji, which were simpler line compositions with washes of colour, and demonstrate Hokusai's understanding that the success of monochrome book illustration relied on the creative use of line, mark-making and dramatic composition.

Throughout *One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji*, Hokusai astounds the viewer with his imagination. The presence of Mt Fuji, with its conical shape and sweeping lines, never appears repetitious. At times it is viewed through swaying willow trees, a bamboo grove, cherry blossoms in full bloom, from a scholar's circular window and through the arches of a bridge; at other times it appears under a waterfall, as a distorted reflection in a lake, through the spherical hoops of an astronomer's device and even projected through a pinhole in the wall onto a paper sliding screen.

Sunset behind Fuji (mirror and stand)

illustration in *One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji* Vol. I (*Fugaku Hyakkei ikkan*)

1834

artist's book: colour woodblocks, paper cover,
stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

View of Fuji over the ocean

illustration in *One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji* Vol. II
(*Fugaku Hyakkei nikan*)

1835

artist's book: colour woodblocks, paper cover, stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The mountain in a snowstorm

illustration in *One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji* Vol. III
(*Fugaku Hyakkei sankan*)

c. 1839

artist's book: colour woodblocks, paper cover,
stitched binding

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

The Life of Shakyamuni

Released in 1845, *The Life of Shakyamuni* is an interpretation of the life of the historical Buddha (Shakyamuni), illustrated by Hokusai and written by Yamada Isai. The six-volume publication consists of fifty-five episodes and thirty-five illustrations and tells the story of Buddha, from his birth in the kingdom of Kapilavastu to the return of his cremated ashes there on the back of a huge white elephant.

Produced when he was eighty-five years old, *The Life of Shakyamuni* was one of Hokusai's last and most elaborately illustrated book projects. In these volumes we see lavish depictions of ornate architecture and exotic landscapes, the physicality and facial expressions of eccentric characters, and terrifying mythical beasts. However, it is Hokusai's masterful skills in composition and pictorial design that make these books so astounding.

Unconventionally, he employed both vertical and horizontal double-page formats to enhance each scene's visual impact. In many works there is a dense overall effect of radiating, swerving or spiralling white lines that fill the narrative with a refined visual tension not usually found in depictions of Shakyamuni's life. As Hokusai approached his final years, this last great series of illustrated books came as a final religious offering from the devout Buddhist.

Yamada ISAI author

Japanese 1788–1846

Katsushika HOKUSAI illustrator

Japanese 1760–1849

Tribute to the King of Kapilavastu

illustration in *The Life of Shakyamuni* Vol. I

(*Shaka goichidaiki zue ikkan*)

published Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka

1845

book: colour woodblocks, 68 pages, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2013

2013.934.a

This scene shows the royal palace of the king of Kapilavastu, where the baby prince Siddhartha (the future Buddha) is to be born. It illustrates the elaborate palace buildings and gardens in the left panel, and the palace gates in the right panel. Outside the gate, townsfolk gather to pay tribute to the king, while inside the palace royal attendants lay prostrate before the ruler to show their devotion to him. The style of architecture created by Hokusai displays a blend of ornate Japanese buildings and imagined faraway places.

Yamada ISAI author

Japanese 1788–1846

Katsushika HOKUSAI illustrator

Japanese 1760–1849

Birth of Buddha

illustration in *The Life of Shakyamuni* Vol. II
(*Shaka goichidaiki zue nikan*)

published Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka
1845

book: colour woodblocks, 76 pages, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2013

2013.934.b

According to legend, dragons sprayed water over the baby Buddha to bathe him at his birth. In this illustration the baby Buddha stands in his conventional birth position, on a lotus flower with his right hand raised and body mostly shrouded by falling water, as if being purified by messengers from the gods. In the upper right corner celestial hosts are in prayer, while in the lower right section crowds of ordinary mortals celebrate Buddha's birth.

Yamada ISAI author

Japanese 1788–1846

Katsushika HOKUSAI illustrator

Japanese 1760–1849

Tested and initiated into four gathas

illustration in *The Life of Shakyamuni* Vol. III

(*Shaka goichidaiki zue sankan*)

published Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka

1845

book: colour woodblocks, 76 pages, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2013

2013.934.c

Gathas are short poems, songs or verses that are often parts of a larger legend. In Buddhism they are designed to help in the practice of meditation and the pathway to enlightenment. In this compelling scene we see Shakyamuni sitting dressed in humble robes, silently reciting *gathas*, while a huge demonic apparition with claw-like hands and feet, muscular hairy arms and chest, double horns and snarling grin towers over him. Hokusai's vivid imagination and fascination with the supernatural world allowed him to create some of the most extreme creatures in Japanese art that continue to influence contemporary Japanese illustrators.

Yamada ISAI author

Japanese 1788–1846

Katsushika HOKUSAI illustrator

Japanese 1760–1849

Vision of paradise and hades

illustration in *The Life of Shakyamuni* Vol. IV
(*Shaka goichidaiki zue yonkan*)

published Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka
1845

book: colour woodblocks, 70 pages, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2013

2013.934.d

This image graphically displays the options for life after death. On the left is a depiction of hades, with two starving and tormented souls overseen by a relaxed-looking demon. He dangles a bottle of water or sake, marked with the Buddhist swastika, above two figures provoking them with the possibility of relief or salvation. On the right-hand side a vision of nirvana is presented with pleasure pavilions, a lake, and bridges bathed in rays of sunlight. The contrast between paradise and hades is magnificently graphic and displays a form of religious propaganda that would remind readers of the torments of hell and pleasures of paradise.

Yamada ISAI author

Japanese 1788–1846

Katsushika HOKUSAI illustrator

Japanese 1760–1849

Devadatta attacks the Buddha

illustration in *The Life of Shakyamuni* Vol. V
(*Shaka goichidaiki zue gokan*)

published Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka
1845

book: colour woodblocks, 60 pages, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2013

2013.934.e

Devadatta was the Buddha's cousin and disciple. He aspired to lead the Buddhist faith and attempted to kill Buddha on three occasions. In this illustration Hokusai has transformed Devadatta into a demonic creature who, after failing to kill Buddha by crushing him with boulders, has himself fallen from the cliff top. In the upper right we can see Buddha and his disciples with halos watching Devadatta plummeting to the depths of hell.

Yamada ISAI author

Japanese 1788–1846

Katsushika HOKUSAI illustrator

Japanese 1760–1849

Conveyance of sarira (Ashes of Shakyamuni)

illustration in *The Life of Shakyamuni* Vol. VI
(*Shaka goichidaiki zue rokkan*)

published Edo (Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka
1845

book: colour woodblocks, 54 pages, paper cover, stitched binding

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2013

2013.934.f

This final image in *The Life of Shakyamuni* shows Buddha's remains being carried by an elephant. As legend has it, after Buddha's death he was cremated and his ashes and other relics were given to the rulers of eight kingdoms, including the kingdom of Kapilavastu – Buddha's birthplace. The gigantic elephant in ceremonial costume, with a small stupa on its back enshrining Buddha's relics, is being escorted by guards. Elephants had rarely been taken to Japan and Hokusai's unusual creature appears to be a hybrid of an elephant and the mythological Baku, a beast with an elephant's head, tusks, and trunk and tiger's claws.

Hokusai Manga Vol. I, 1814
Hokusai Manga Vol. II, 1815
Hokusai Manga Vol. III, 1815
Hokusai Manga Vol. IV, 1816
Hokusai Manga Vol. V, 1816
Hokusai Manga Vol. VI, 1817
Hokusai Manga Vol. VII, 1817
Hokusai Manga Vol. VIII, 1818
Hokusai Manga Vol. IX, 1819
Hokusai Manga Vol. X, 1819
Hokusai Manga Vol. XI, 1833
Hokusai Manga Vol. XII, 1834
Hokusai Manga Vol. XIII, 1849
Hokusai Manga Vol. XIV, 1850
Hokusai Manga Vol. XV, 1878
One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji
Vol. I, 1834
One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji
Vol. II, 1835
One Hundred Views of Mt Fuji
Vol. III, c. 1839
The Life of Shakyamuni Vol. I, 1845
The Life of Shakyamuni Vol. II, 1845
The Life of Shakyamuni Vol. III, 1845
The Life of Shakyamuni Vol. IV, 1845
The Life of Shakyamuni Vol. V, 1845
The Life of Shakyamuni Vol. VI, 1845

Man washing potatoes

Imoarai

from an untitled series of blue prints (*aizuri*)

1831

woodblock

The Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, Matsumoto

Man washing potatoes was made using three shades of diluted Prussian blue, and is thought to have been published at a similar time as the Prussian blue works in the *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* series. In Japan, moon viewing has been an influence on poetry, literature and the visual arts over the centuries, and a much loved pastime for people of all social classes. Hokusai's passion for humorously depicting ordinary people engaging in everyday activities and interacting with nature can be found in the unusual vantage point found by an old man (perhaps Hokusai himself) to gain a clear view of the autumnal full moon.

Self-taught Dancing Apprenticeship

Hokusai's book *Self-taught Dancing Apprenticeship* (*Odori hitori geiko*) (1815) provides insights into his fascination with depicting movement, his interest in theatrical culture and his playful sense of humour. 239 drawings of individual figures, included over seventy-four pages, illustrate how to do five different kabuki stage dances, allowing budding amateurs to practice the same dances.

Some figures have additional lines added to emphasise the movement of the actor's arms and legs. The third dance sequence is noted as performed by the actor Ichikawa Danjiro VII, famous for his villain roles. On several of the figures we see the written character for *aku* (evil) written on a disc that covers the dancer's face.

The NGV Multimedia team has animated Hokusai's still drawings to demonstrate that he had an understanding of creating moving images. *Self-taught Dancing Apprenticeship* was conceived more than fifteen years before the creation of European spinning animation disc device, known as the phenakistiscope, in the 1830s; more than seventy-five years before the first animated film by Charles-Émile Reynaud in 1892; and more than 100 years before Walt Disney produced his first animated films.

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